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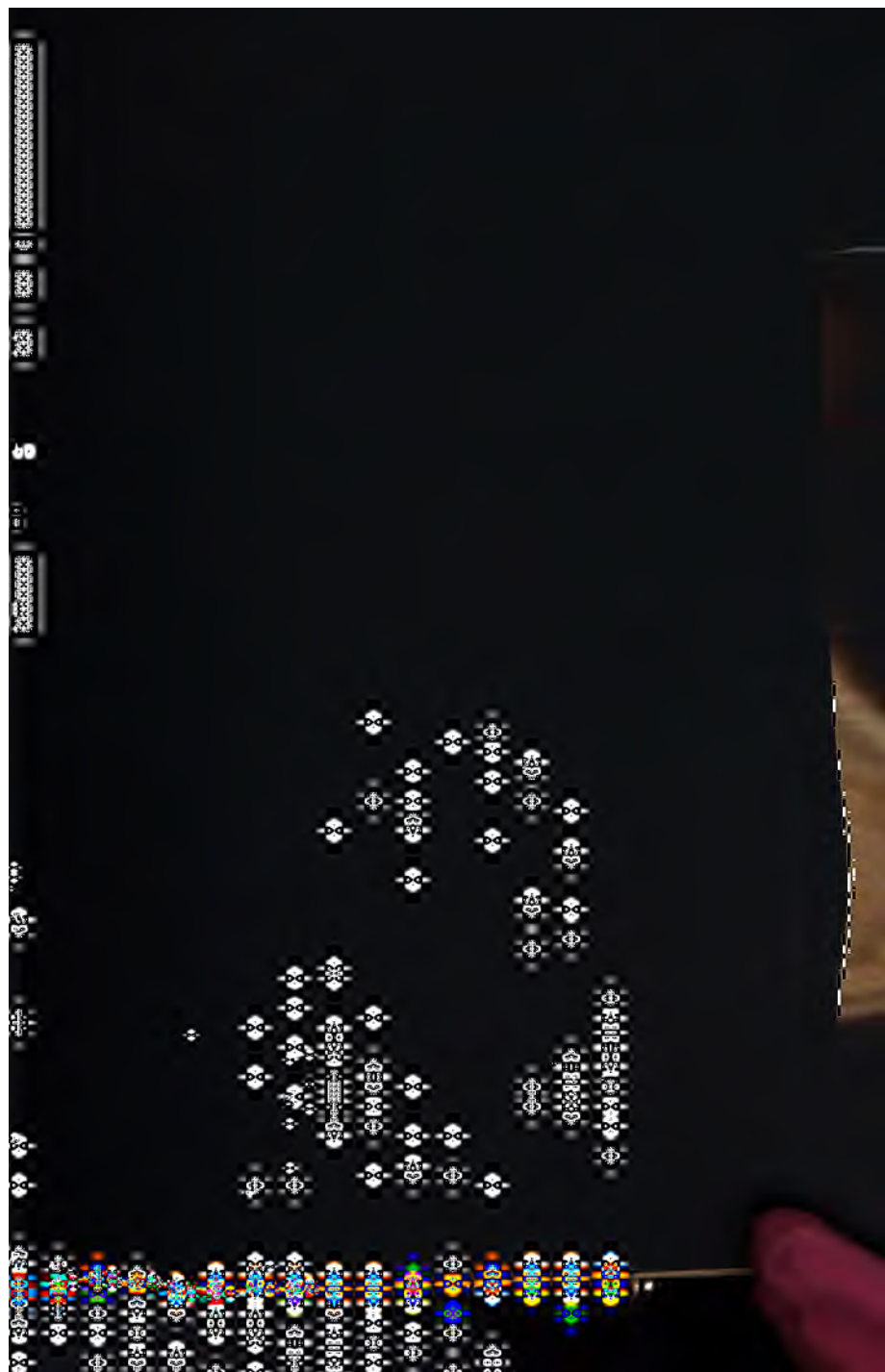
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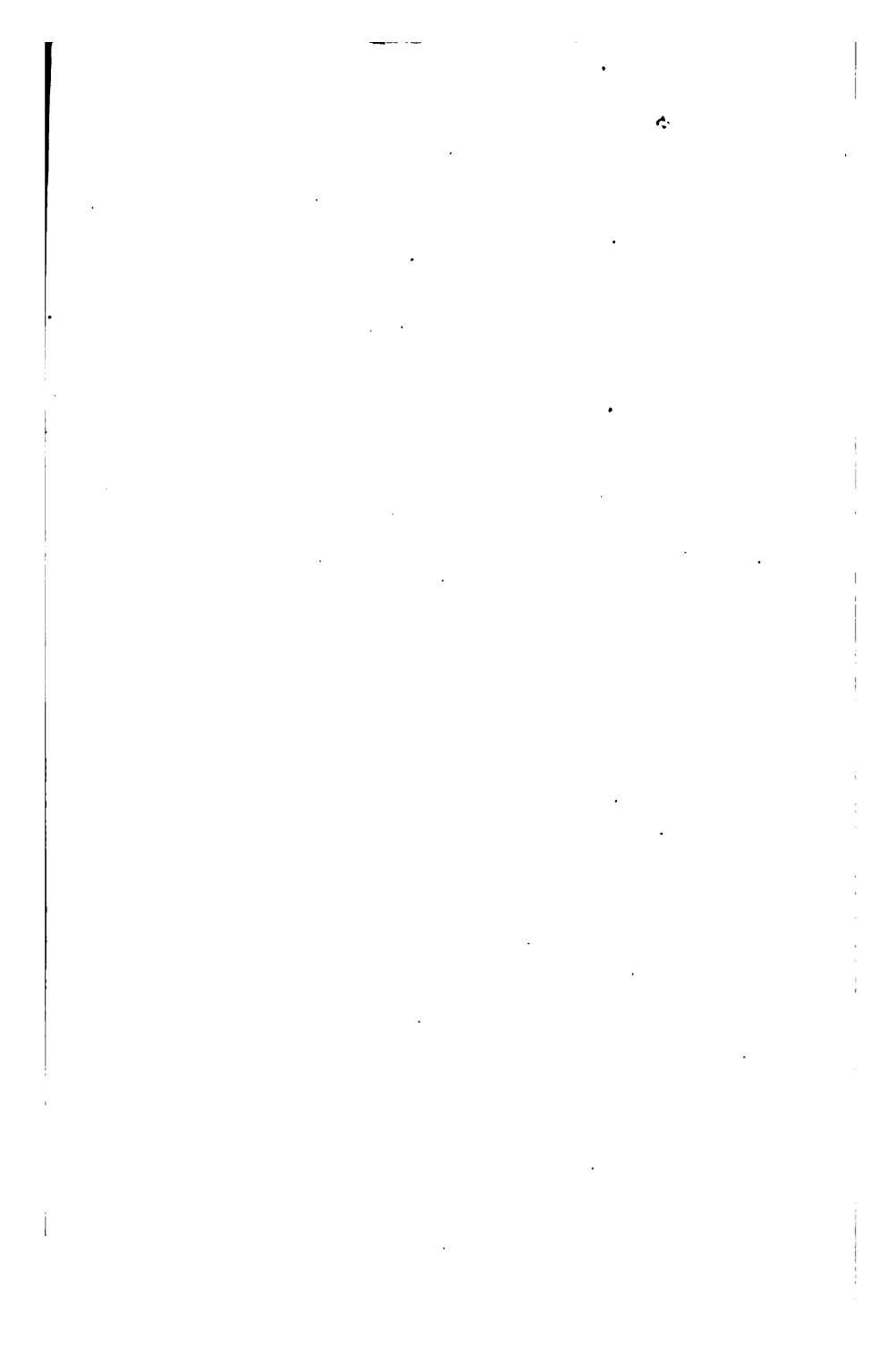
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# **LECTURES ON GENESIS.**

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LECTURES  
ON  
EARLY SCRIPTURE.

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GENESIS.

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BY  
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HASTINGS.

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## PREFACE.

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THE substance of the following pages, originally produced in the form of Sermons, having been thought likely to be of use to some persons, has been recast in the present shape. Passages which seemed more particularly fit for the pulpit have been left out; while others, as, for instance, the observations on miracles and justification, have been introduced. The object of the Lectures is to show something of the justice, wisdom, and love of the Divine system as revealed in the earlier part of Scripture, and to point out some particulars in the harmonious construction of the narrative; in both which ways of vindication it seeks to address itself to an earnest and intelligent inquirer.



## CONTENTS.



LECT.	PAGE
I. On the Idea of God and his Plan, as consistently presented in Scripture . . . .	1
II. On the Idea of Man, and the Divine Action in relation to him . . . . .	14
III. On the Fall, in its Cause and Consequence . .	21
IV. On the Quality of Sin as a Breach of Law, and on the Magnitude of the Remedy necessary for it . . . . .	33
V. On the Harmony of Scripture with the above Requirements in its general System, and also in its Details concerning Cain and Abel . .	39
VI. On the increasing Consequences of Sin, as producing the Flood . . . . .	51
VII. On the Consistency of the above with Divine and Human Attributes . . . . .	64
VIII. On the Significance of the Ark, and the Wonders connected with it . . . . .	73
IX. Causes of the common Difficulty with regard to Miracles, and on the just Method of meeting it . . . . .	80

LECT.	PAGE
X. A closer Consideration of the Miraculous . . . . .	88
XI. On the Significance of Noah in the Narrative, and of the Rising against him, and its Con- sequence . . . . .	110
XII. On the Effort of the Babel Builders and their System, and on the Value of the Dispersion . . . . .	122
XIII. On the Epoch of Abraham, and the general Outline of the Divine Dealing with him and with his Descendants . . . . .	137
XIV. Reasons for the Plan of the Biography of Abraham, as given in Scripture, and on the general Meaning of his Life . . . . .	147
XV. On Abraham's and Lot's Action in inter- relation . . . . .	158
XVI. On the comparative Growth of the Worldly System and the Divine, and on the Meaning of Melchisedek . . . . .	171
XVII. On the Object placed at the Beginning of the particular Dispensation, and on Faith with regard to it . . . . .	185
XVIII. On the several Revelations to Abraham, and on the Unity of his Promise . . . . .	202
XIX. On the lower Effort of Abraham to realise Promise. On the setting aside of Hagar's Child, and on her Blessing . . . . .	212
XX. On the Ratification of the Covenant with Abraham, and on its Seal, Circumcision . . . . .	230

# Contents.

ix

LECT.	PAGE
XXI. On Abraham's Office in Relation to Sodom, and on the Meaning of the Destruction of the Cities . . . . .	242
XXII. On Abraham in his Position as Man and in his prophetic Office . . . . .	253
XXIII. On the Birth of the Child of Promise, and on the Meanings contained in his Offering by Abraham . . . . .	262
XXIV. On the Significance of the Narrative as re- gards the Burial of Abraham's Wife, the Marriage of his Son, and his own Death . . . . .	280

## *Erratum.*

Page 63, line 1, for 'cataclasm' read 'cataclysm'





LECTURES  
ON  
EARLY SCRIPTURE.

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I.

IN times when supposed discords between nature and the Scriptures meet in some quarters with a very ready reception, it should not be allowed to pass unobserved by candid inquirers, that at the very beginning of the Bible a note is struck with which science still harmonises. We are brought by the writer of the early Scripture at once into the presence of God. He is revealed to us in his unity. He is found in what we still observe to be his true relationship to his creation. He is found calling it into being.

## 2      Lectures on Early Scripture.

He is described as developing it gradually—with a regard to the wants of the created—and rejoicing in it as a work which is very good. This page which is thus showing his nature, his power, his providence, his beneficence, is setting forth to us, it should be remembered, a divine ruler invested with those very qualities which philosophy would now infer him to possess. In other words, after so many ages of reflection, natural philosophy, however enlightened, has never yet superseded the first Bible picture of the God of Nature. Nothing that it has learned, in its researches into visible things, has enabled it to form a simpler, grander, or more appropriate idea of God than Scripture presents to it; and whenever it has dealt with the idea of the Divine Being at all, it has been content to accept either the Scripture idea, or one extremely near to it. If, then, as the narrative advances, we come upon passages, as we shall, where the character and conduct of God may appear differently and less divinely portrayed than at the

beginning of the Bible, let it be remembered that this character was not so drawn by the writer in ignorance, but advisedly. If God is described speaking to a man 'as one speaketh to his friend,' it is not because the writer knew not of his grandeur as Lord of the Universe, but it is for some other reason. When in the last chapters of Genesis, or elsewhere, we find the God of the covenant described as encouraging, threatening, examining, rewarding, punishing in Canaan, we are precluded from saying this is written of him in accommodation, or as an expression of the tone of mind and opinion of a period but little enlightened in such matters. We could not say this, because we find that the writer had there before him already on his page the grandest and truest conceptions of the divinity in relation to nature; so that this writer, if he could, notwithstanding these previous statements, in which God seems so much more adequately and worthily described, still afterwards speak of him in a different and apparently less dignified manner in

#### 4      Lectures on Early Scripture.

relation to man, very evidently did so, not from ignorance, but, because he had some cause for using such a form, and believed there was, in truth, a relation between Him and man very different from that between Him and nature. It was not that he supposed the God he spoke about was the God only of a nation, or a city, or the God of the hills or plains, or merely the tutelary guardian of an eminent individual, and that He was on such account engaged with Abraham and Israel in the intimate relations described. On the contrary, he knew him to be the God of the universe, and ruler of the heavens, and of all men and things, so that when with this knowledge expressed on his earliest pages, he still described him as revealing himself to shepherds and the like, it is evident he meant to infer, not that God was small, but that man was great; not that the divine was to be lowered into the trivial, but that the human was to be raised into great and unsuspected importance.

This introductory subject for observation,

then, is one of a very interesting and valuable character, and should receive due attention. For certainly it is a remarkable instance of consistency (and a favourable probability proportionate in degree), when a professed revelation, which, as it proceeds, is found to develop so peculiar a relationship between God and man, is also found, from the very first, in those of its documents which belong to a much more remote age, to have laid down the outline of that relationship so accurately, that there was never any occasion afterwards to depart from it. In other words, that the wonderful dealing of God towards man, which was referred to by the Psalmist (Ps. viii. 3, 4): ‘When I consider thy heavens, the work of thy fingers, the moon and the stars, which thou hast ordained; what is man, that thou art mindful of him? and the son of man, that thou visitest him?’—a relationship which was found to be still more wonderful, as later Scriptures revealed more of the whole plan, and showed the extent of Divine condescension and love, was a

## 6      Lectures on Early Scripture.

relationship which was laid down in all its strange and strong proportions from the very first pages of Scripture.

And this course of observation might be extended farther. Thus, whatever the opinions of any particular persons may be on the way in which evil began and is continued, Scripture has laid down for itself a principle at its very commencement, from which it never departs, and which it never outgrows. It ascribes evil at once to the personal agency of the devil, and it does not even in its most advanced development introduce any ideas on evil which cannot be accounted for on that principle. The same also may be said with regard to man, the other Scripture agent. His position is at once defined — his relationship to God ascertained ; and the incidents recorded in the first few lines of his history contain the principles on which his whole subsequent progress through time is described as dependent.

Such observations, which regard the principle of consistency, are not only true with

reference to the great agencies of the Scripture system — they may be observed also in the details of the Scripture machinery. Whatever date anyone may please to consider should be assigned to parts of the volume, he will have to observe, if he would consider the subject in a philosophical and reasonable manner, not only that there is one general plan pervading the whole, but that the same way of carrying on that plan prevails through the whole. For instance, that there are to be found the ideas of apparitions, and prophecies, and miracles, and a succession of eminent individuals, recurring over and over again, in parts of the narrative belonging to totally different times; and further, that such apparitions and miracles are constantly found accompanying events of similar significance; that such prophecies have constantly the same moral tendency, and that such individuals have all a certain resemblance to the one great central character, which it is the object of the volume to introduce. The same sort of remark may be applied even to the form

## 8      Lectures on Early Scripture.

and proportion of the narrative. Thus, while some systems of religion have indulged in elaborate accounts of the creation of the world, and of the various orders of beings visible and invisible, the Scripture enters upon nothing of the sort. Sketching slightly, but with signs of marvellous depth of meaning, those outlines which it is the task of human discovery to fill up, and, by stopping short of the origin of matter, avoiding that rock on which so many human schemes have drifted, it passes rapidly on until it arrives at the true beginning of its subject—the origin of man and the cause of his present position, and here it at once dilates. It continues the same treatment throughout. It frequently contracts what are commonly considered historical events within narrow limits, while it expands incidents of private biography into the proportions usually given to history. But while it thus departs from the usual scale, it is in both cases true to its own system, which it pursues throughout with undeviating consistency.



Seeing, then, that Scripture, from the first, adopted a general idea of God far higher than other religions had introduced—an idea, the importance of which will be more apparent in proportion as we observe the weakness of different efforts which philosophy has made in the same direction—seeing that even up to the present time that general idea of God remains in undisturbed possession of our minds, and that none, whatever objection they may have raised to details of the representation, have been able themselves to substitute a picture of the Divine, which in its general features is worthy to supplant it—seeing, further, that in the hands of different writers, through a long course of time, Scripture constantly remains consistent with itself in carrying out the general ideas with which it commences, and in doing so continually by the same sort of machinery, working on the same plan, even when its outer shapes seem least alike—seeing, in short, that the Sacred Volume is consistent with science and with itself, both in its plan and in its way of carrying it forward, and that

this consistency shows itself in many more ways than are apparent on the surface, or can reasonably have been considered the result of intention in the writers;—this class of harmonies is sufficient, without mentioning now the higher relations between Scripture and the soul, to raise the very strongest presumptions in favour of the Divine authority of the Sacred Volume. And it has to be noted, in connection with these presumptions, that in such a subject they afford a stronger ground of proof than on common matters. For the introduction of any positive evidence to the contrary will, in common matters, destroy the value of a series of presumptions, however strong they may previously have seemed; but in this subject of religion, which, as presented to us, does not from the nature of the case admit of these positive proofs, there is nothing which can be set against this mass of presumptions in favour of Scripture except an equivalent collection of presumptions against it. For it would be but a trifling way of reasoning, though not very

uncommon, if one were to take, say, for instance, some particular miracles of the Old Testament, which might appear to him to present an inadequate unworthy view of God, and upon them proceed to throw discredit on the whole Old Testament system, for it is evident that the real question there would be, not whether such probabilities against Scripture, taken by themselves, were conclusive against it, but whether, when such probabilities are weighed in comparison with the opposite probabilities in favour of the Old Testament—probabilities springing from its generally exalted conception of the Divine character, and of the position and destinies of man, and of the work of God in relation to him, and also from the way in which these ideas are adhered to and worked out, and the like, those which are against Scripture are, on the whole, stronger than those which are in its favour. And the man who, without entering into this comparison of the two sides of the question, were to allow himself to give up his allegiance to Scripture merely from a

## 12      Lectures on Early Scripture.

partial view of the difficulties which seem to him to lie on its surface, would be as unreasonable as another, who should adopt a religion on similar partial grounds. Indeed, more so, for he who gives up not only sets aside the weight of testimony which may be collected from the frame of Scripture itself, but also the collateral evidence afforded by the fact, that vast numbers of men, able, learned, wise, and pious, to whom these difficulties have been not less apparent than to the objector—men who have, doubtlessly, carefully examined them, whose processes of examination are in many instances on record, have not considered such difficulties a sufficient reason for arriving at conclusions adverse to Scripture. And, indeed, it has further to be borne in mind, that some of those very points which on first sight appear the most difficult, are found, on fuller acquaintance with the subject, to become valuable confirmations; and this is found the case so frequently as to make it a probable question whether a still stronger power of scrutinising the subject

would not resolve all these nebulous mists into bright stars of light, and show us in this spiritual firmament an order not less complete than that which reigns in the universe around us.

## II.

ON turning from observations of the above class to a more particular examination of some of the leading features of early Scripture, the doctrine of the Fall is among the first which claims attention. This doctrine is one which has occasioned to some minds the following sort of perplexity. It has appeared to them, that if beings the moment they are created fall into ruin themselves, entail great miseries on their countless descendants, and necessitate a sacrifice of the most stupendous character for their recovery, then that there is in some sort of way a flaw or deficiency in the original design of the Creator, and some sort of failure in that moral justice which his creatures have a right to expect at his hands. That is to say, in effect, that the Scripture, in laying its great

foundations, has in this matter deviated from those fundamental notions of the Divine conduct and character which all men necessarily and by a sort of intuition possess.

Such objections, it is true, may easily be silenced by pointing out that which is no doubt the case, that from our present position we are unable to observe and estimate the dealings of God sufficiently to warrant us in forming any such notions concerning him, and that our true policy and duty is to hold our judgments in suspense, and to accept with meekness the revelations of his divine counsels. Such advice would be excellent, and to act upon it is one of the best results which a religious discipline of the mental faculties insures; but it is by no means one of the earliest attained, and in the meantime, while such questions and difficulties suggest themselves, it may be worth while to consider whether to these questions, based only on suppositions, there may not also be answers, not certain but probable answers, dependent upon a series of suppositions equally and even

## 16      Lectures on Early Scripture.

more valid; and whether, while it is admitted on all sides that the highest and happiest state is that of an unquestioning acquiescence of the individual intellect in the Divine counsels, there may not yet be other preparatory states in which, to such probable objections, corresponding probable explanations may be offered, and whether in this particular case, on consideration, it will not appear how very far this supposed difficulty is from being well founded. In estimating this question of the Fall, let it be remembered, first, how great would be the enterprise of creating man. To take of the dust on one hand, to take of the living element on the other, to unite in the same being heaven and earth, to connect by this one intermediate living link matter and spirit, to complete the gradually ascending series from the creature world up to the Creator — all these great efforts of creative energy are comprised in the idea of the First Man. Also, let it be remembered, that when God would make man, He would put in abeyance something of His own power.



He binds in obedience other things by His own will — a will absolute, and which can never be broken by them. The star cannot depart from the path of its sphere; the animal cannot depart from the course of its instinct; but when He would frame a being who should have the high privileges which He has allowed to manhood, may it not be that it could only be done by a surrender on God's part of some of His own prerogative? To give man the faculty of willing, may it not be that He must suspend in proportionate degree His own will; that He must put it in man's power either to obey Him or disobey Him; that He must only reserve to Himself to place before the new creature moral considerations which shall either check or encourage him, but that He, the divine Lord, whose sovereignty is in all else supreme, must run the risk of having His holy laws broken, if He would confer upon His creature the privilege of keeping them voluntarily; that He must already begin to make surrenders, and to sacrifice Himself to that being

## 18      Lectures on Early Scripture.

whom He would raise up beyond a mere machine into a free agent, capable of approaching the great future He has in store for him?

And it seems the case that the freedom of choice in man should be insisted on when considering this subject; for, if it were otherwise, and no such freedom existed, might not the gravest consequences follow the mutilation of this idea? Might it not be justly asserted that man, deprived of his freedom, would be responsible for nothing, since he would become a mere automaton? and would not also the prospects of his future career disappear at the same time as his liabilities?\*

And, if so, now consider this creature with so strong an affinity for earth, and endowed with the power of obeying or disobeying. Remember further, that he occupies a position in which God, from the interval between their natures, must be partly hid from him. Remember that his safety consists in obedience to a law which, however simple, he

\* Bishop Sherlock, Disc. xxv. pt. i.; Justin Mart. Apol. ii.

cannot perfectly understand; and in trust to a Being he can only partially see. Remember that his own free-will in choosing a line of conduct must not be interfered with beyond a certain point; and that an evil counsellor has access to him. Estimate these conditions fully, and then after all, instead of saying, 'Here is a weak plan which must break down when tested by our moral instincts,' is it not, at the least, as just and as reasonable to say, 'O wonderful bounty of Divine love, which will not shrink from such an array of adverse chance as this, but will venture all loss that man may gain!'

And when it is remembered that the word 'chance' has in reality no place in the matter; that the result, according to Scripture, was certain, and known to be certain; that all the stupendous machinery of man's redemption and salvation was calculated and arranged beforehand; that it was certain at the very time when God said 'Let us make man in our own image,' that the 'Good Shepherd' would have to go into the wilderness to seek the lost

## 20      Lectures on Early Scripture.

sheep, that the Son of God would have to enter the world among the humiliations of Bethlehem, and leave it among the agonies of Calvary; then, instead of doubting whether this theory is worthy of men, may it not be felt that man's lips and heart are not yet fit for this great theme, but that it must be the occupation of eternity to know this love which passeth knowledge?

On the whole, therefore, in answer to the suspicion whether the trials which are described as having fallen upon the human race in consequence of their possession of a certain freedom of choice and action be such as can be supposed consistent with the general notions we have of the character of God, it must be admitted, after regarding the Scripture plan in its true bearings, not only that the beneficent attributes of God are justified by it, but that they in nothing shine forth so brightly as in what He has surrendered, allowed, suffered, and accomplished in connection with these great events.

## III.

HAVING concluded that the Fall, as described in Scripture, is an event which enhances instead of compromising the benevolent character of God, it has further to be considered concerning it as a question of fact, that it was an event likely to occur from the very nature and position of man; and this not only on account of free-will, but also on account of those conditions under which free-will would be exercised—the conditions, that is, of his having a partly animal nature and a home here on earth, which would naturally incline his wishes, desires, prospects, and occupations to this present scene; while, if he had to be prepared for another and very different career, to which this present life is only an introduction, the effort of that preparative work would be to raise him up in thought and hope

## 22      Lectures on Early Scripture.

above what he should see <sup>at</sup> around him on earth, to make him really feel his relationship to God, and serve Him in full trust. For a necessary element of his happiness and safety must, under such circumstances, be his capacity and decision to conform his own will to the Divine will; and, therefore, his training and teaching must necessarily be in the qualities by which such results are introduced, that is, by efforts of faith and obedience leading on to fulness of loving service. To carry out this training it would be necessary some rule should be given; some command which he might obey, and wherein obedience and faith might be exercised; and it would be very fit, and indeed seemingly necessary, that such command should be one the usefulness of which would not be self-evident, so that faith might be exercised and that the man might be taught to say, 'Though I do not see why this should be done, yet I do it because it is God's will, and therefore I know it is good and right and true.' Some such training as this would obviously be necessary; for as this new creature raised from the dust might advance,

and the more he might advance towards God's presence, the more need would he find to exercise such habits of trust and obedience. Now, as to the instrument by which such training should be carried on, it seems clear that whatever other qualities the rule which should test and exercise obedience and faith might possess, it should at any rate possess these—that it should be a plain and clear injunction, so that there should be no excuse of ambiguity for disobeying it; and also that it should not be so obviously beneficial as to make it no effort to obey it. It appears that the rule which in Scripture is described as given, justly fulfilled these conditions; and that at the same time it was so simple and elementary in its character as to show how gently and with how little pressure the essential process of trial was applied. That single rule was to gauge the faculties of these souls, and to develop their capacities and contents. But under such pressure, though thus lightly applied, man failed and fell.

Now what is the Fall, as regards the three parties concerned in it?

## 24      Lectures on Early Scripture.

As regards God, it is sometimes erroneously described as if God were taken by surprise, and His plan defeated at the very beginning. Nothing of the sort appears to be the case. Foreseen, provided, foreremied, the Fall is substantially a setting forth of the real problem to be solved, and it is from this point that the solemn prearranged drama of human life begins its orderly course.

As regards Satan, the Fall is on a great scale that which, in the after-narrative, is so often seen on a smaller and more detailed scale—his greatest seeming triumph converted into his greatest real defeat—the malignity of the inferior nature foiled and turned against its own plans by the superior.

As regards man, the Fall is guilt, degradation, death. Little, however, would one appreciate the depths of God's plan, were he not to remember that out of that guilt will eventually emerge man's perfected innocence—out of that degradation his highest honours—out of that death his everlasting life. Instinct with these characteristics, the Bible



narrative accompanies our fallen first parents from Paradise to commence with them the pilgrimage of generations. And whoever would understand how probable, and indeed how necessary, it would be that the events of the coming history should in course occur, ought not to pass over this first incident, the Fall, without calculating how much is locked up in the idea. For in this, as in so many other cases, surprise at the consequence which follows is owing to the having neglected to understand the causes which introduced it.

Our first parents had preferred as their choice, instead of obedience to God, that which appeared pleasurable, profitable, emancipative, and conducive to life. As their gain, however, they carry out from Paradise the sentence of toil, of subject desires, of pain, and death. If this seems in any degree a hardship, first let it be remembered what obedience to God implies. It implies harmony with a perfect law; it implies union of purpose and action with that Lawgiver, whose actions can never fail of accomplishing their object, and

## 26      Lectures on Early Scripture.

whose objects are invariably benevolent in the best way. To obey God, then, is to be connected with a policy which must succeed; and whose success must produce the highest results. This necessarily follows from the very idea of God; and it also follows that to disobey God's plans is to be opposed to what must succeed; in other words, to fail; to be engaged in an opposition to beneficent plans, and finally to fail in that opposition. This struggle against the all-wise and all-loving law in its applications to body, mind, spirit, society, nature, constitutes the phases in fallen life; and the struggle, however protracted, must, from the force of the very terms under which it is carried on, bring pain and misery during its continuance; and could the conditions of physical life be fully weighed it might be seen, not merely as a matter of fact, that death does result, but also as a matter of calculation, that it must result from such a struggle. And if anyone should here be inclined to point out as an objection that it is considered settled by scientific researches

that death existed normally in the world of animal nature before the period assigned for man's fall, he must remember that his task will be more than this, if he would deal fully with the point; for, even admitting death to be originally the normal end of life in the animal nature, yet man is, as is evident to ourselves, the first step beyond the animal nature; and also, according to the Scripture theory, is the link by which the two systems of nature are to be united—the visible and the invisible, the mortal and the immortal; and it therefore by no means follows, on this supposition, that death in the animal world would prove necessarily that death was an original incident in the human race also. It is to be observed, too, in connection with this point, that though death is described in Scripture as happening to all men, yet that it is described, consistently, as not happening in a necessary way; that it is said to have originated in the declension of the first parents from the invisible, which should have been their aim, to the visible and material—in their

## 28      Lectures on Early Scripture.

preference of the lower to the higher; that it is always assumed that death is only temporary; that it will have no final influence over man; that immortality is his real state; and further, that in virtue of man's spiritual affinities, death need not have occurred to him at all. It is in Scripture assumed as possible, that he should pass from life here to his eternal state without the intervention of any death. It is described as a fact, that in several cases it actually did so happen; and that although, with the many, in the dimmed state of the fallen humanity, the conditions of the animal part of the nature prevail for a time, and like the animal, the fallen manhood wastes and wears and dies out, yet that still, as an essential part of its humanity, it will live again.

And if that objection already mentioned, and which is indeed inveterate, should again occur, and it should be questioned whether the Divine grace might not in some way have averted such results, let it be remembered that theology has reverently laid down

from observation and study the limits within which grace moves; and that while on the one hand it would be considered the error of the Pelagian and Semi-Pelagian to confine grace to outward means of impressing man, it would on the other hand be considered the error of the enthusiast to allow that grace in the heart could so compel a being in a probationary state as to override and annul his freedom of choice.\*

But here, again, return should be made to that one great thought which completes the balance of so many reasonings. Let it be remembered that a ray of light was to be shed by the first promise on the darkened path of erring men, and that it was to gradually spread itself and gain brightness and clearness, until the glorious sunlight should burst forth in its strength. Let it be remembered that each great event in divinely-modelled history was to convey some new lesson, and give some new preparation, until at last God

\* Hooker, *v.* Appendix i.; Augustin. de Spiritu et Lit. s. 52.

## 30      Lectures on Early Scripture.

Himself in the fulness of time should manifest Himself in the flesh. And the human nature being thus linked into the divine, new possibilities should arise for man, since the Spirit of God would henceforth move freely in the hearts of His people, and they should be made willing in the day of His power. And with these facts before the mind, let it be considered whether the great plan of revelation is not fully consistent and adequate, as it describes how from that time Satan like lightning falls from heaven. His hold is loosed, death is swallowed up in victory, and eternal life secured in its brightest form to all who accept Christ as their Saviour.

Each servant of His, become a spiritual man, reverses in his individual case the choice of Adam, the natural man. Adam chose gratification, the Christian chooses restraint. Adam chose present advantage, the Christian in faith chooses future blessing. Adam chose self-pleasing, the Christian chooses obedience to God.

The original position is reoccupied; the

first outline drawn for our race is filled in; but under what changed aspects! Nature is purified, God is magnified. Heaven and earth are united; the destiny of the creature is revealed and advanced; there is glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace and good-will towards men. Whatever of good seemed lost at the beginning of the plan, is found only to have been hidden as seed is hidden in the earth, that it might bear more fruit. If the severity of God is apparent, it is only that His goodness may afterwards be far more apparent; if mist seems to obscure the early dawn of the Scripture dispensation; it is only because there will afterwards shine forth most brightly 'the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.' There is in all this a unity of purpose and harmony of arrangement, which should to a reflecting mind convey very high satisfaction; which should encourage us to approach with reverent interest the detail of progressing Scripture, and when we meet with difficulties, which

### 32      Lectures on Early Scripture.

must from the very nature of the case not unfrequently happen, to endure them with patience; satisfied of this, that in a design the grand outline of which we can—even with our imperfect powers—see to be so complete, there must be somewhere, could we discover it, the exact place into which that which for the hour baffles us would fit.



## IV.

IF, in accordance with the previous remarks, we consider it to be the fact that the Divine plan in the creation of man is one highly beneficial and benevolent in its character and objects (and, indeed, it would be difficult to conceive any different reason for creation at all); if it be further allowed that free-will is an essential attribute of man (of which, without much abstract reasoning, our own experience is to us sufficient proof); if we consider it probable, that, however graciously God's manifestations of Himself may have been vouchsafed, and however strong the barriers of primitive innocence may have been, yet that the free choice of man would find some strong solicitations from the outer world, and from his own nature (especially when we consider these as acted on by the temptations of

## 34      Lectures on Early Scripture.

a power of evil hostile to God), then we are by such considerations, succeeding one another as they do in regular order, brought into the presence of that great phenomenon of sin, on which so much of theology depends.

Sin is the breaking of God's law. And one of the great causes of mistake in theology, no less than of error in life, is the miscalculation of the importance of the consequences of sin. If we set out with our notion on the meaning of sin well settled, this will of itself be the answer to many questions, and will clear up many things in Scripture and in life which would otherwise be difficult.

The actual state of the case may, perhaps, be arrived at in this way. Let one of the laws by which God governs the outer world be taken; for instance, the law by which bodies in motion tend to escape from the centre, or the law by which they seek the centre. No one will be found to say that these are likely to be more important in God's consideration than the laws of right

and wrong. Let them be supposed equally important, equally constant, and perpetual; and then if the question be to ascertain what would be the consequence of breaking the one which we find it difficult to appreciate (that is, the moral law), let it be considered, what would be the consequence of breaking the other, the physical law? Suppose a world escaping, though only in a single act, from the influence of the laws of gravitation, total physical ruin must be the result. And what reason is there which careful consideration would approve, for supposing that when the other law, the moral, is broken, though in this case also it should be only in a single act or instance, there would not also equally follow total moral ruin?

A prudent person should not allow himself to be deprived of this conclusion, by finding whither it leads; nor should he allow himself to fall back for support in his prejudice upon that self-complacency, which is so constantly engaged in seeking to make us, as individuals,

except ourselves from general rules, however comprehensive.

If due weight be given to these reflections on the consequences to be expected from sin as a breach of law, it will be found that the way is cleared for an explanation, as far as we need one, of how moral ruin, total, ever-darkening, might follow to fallen angels from some past rebellion; and how they might through it be placed in incessant discord with God and good. The ground will also be prepared for the consideration of a subject which presents itself at this point—viz., how from one act of human disobedience there should enter instantly a darkness and depravity, deepening, spreading, multiplying, until all man had hopelessly corrupted his way on the earth. Such reflections also will have led us to expect that if man should be stopped in his fall, brought up again, and placed where he was before, or taken still higher, it must be by some help outside himself—something not human, but superhuman; and, indeed, the more we reflect on the conditions of all

these Divine laws, and on the consequences which seem necessarily involved in the breach of them, the more ready we shall grow to own that if man were to be saved out of this difficulty, however he might have first been made capable of falling into it, he must be saved by some very great help applied; so that, at last, by considering the matter fully, it will appear that the extreme remedy which the Scriptures present, i. e. the way of salvation by the Son of God manifested and sacrificed, is not out of proportion to the real emergency of the case, however disproportionate it may be to that easy notion of man's delinquency, which is taken up before the subject has been enquired into. If we are content with these prejudices, for they rest on no scientific basis, then we shall consider the act of breaking those laws of moral government, which we see broken every hour, to be an unimportant act; then we shall consider the fall of angels, and fall of man, and the redemption of man as unaccounted for in any sufficient way. But, let it be observed, that

### 38      Lectures on Early Scripture.

we shall then have to explain how it comes to happen that there should be such inconsistency in God's plan of government (or rather such inconsistency in God's mind, for Divine law is the expression of the Divine will) that one set of laws may not be broken without the greatest penalties affixed, while breaches of the other, and certainly not less important set, carry no consequences at all. And, indeed, there is a further difficulty involved, for the question might here be added whether, after all, these great consequences following any breaking of God's laws must not be admitted from the very force of the terms—whether they do not flow out necessarily from the very nature of the circumstances—and whether it could justly be imagined possible that such consequences could in any way be arrested and reversed, except by some such process as the Scriptures undertake to describe and unfold.

## V.

IF, then, bearing the above principles in mind, we pass on to an examination of the actual facts described in Scripture, we shall find them arranged in accordance with those principles. When we find that overwhelming evil is attributed to the one sin of Adam as its source, and that this evil at once begins to show itself with the greatest violence in Cain, this will not be to us any occasion of difficulty; for so long as the principles on which Scripture depends are borne in mind, the events of sacred history will appear connected with them and with each other in so natural a way—they will show themselves so satisfactorily to be all referrible to one great design, in which their place may, without difficulty, be found, that their details (some of which in ordinary narrative would seem

disproportioned) will, when measured by their own true rule, be observed to be in perfect and appropriate keeping.

And, indeed, one of the most frequent causes of that sort of instinctive repulsion with which some of the events in Scripture are by some minds regarded, is that such events are referred by these minds to the ordinary standards in the history of human affairs, or in the course of nature—as commonly understood—with neither of which, however, they have an immediate connection; while scriptural principles, the true standard by which they should be judged, are not at all taken into account in considering them. The consequence in this, as in all similar cases, is an abundance of rash speculation and irreverent conclusion, though there are no other cases in which such conclusions are attended with equally serious results. It seems, unfortunately, to be supposed that because religion is a subject in which all are most deeply concerned, all are therefore in a position to pass a valid opinion upon the



machinery of religion; which is as unreasonable as to imagine that because we are all interested on the subject of health, therefore we are all able to form sound opinions on the science of physiology. It is true, no doubt, that where a demand is made upon us for personal submission, as is the case in religion, we have a claim to examine the credentials on which its authority is based; but it has also, on its side, a right to require from us that such examination should be patiently and modestly conducted; and that as we come to it we should bear in mind those conditions on which it, as revelation, depends, and by the light of which it needs to be examined that it may be understood.

If the above considerations meet on our part with attention, it is probable that as we meditate on the brief record which Scripture supplies of early history, it will appear to us that both the incidents which are introduced, and their order and proportion in the narrative, even when at first sight they appear unexpected, are yet in reality upon reflection the

## 42      Lectures on Early Scripture.

very arrangement which best accommodates itself to, or rather which most readily flows from, the principles on which the Sacred Volume is founded.

And now, from these observations, let us pass on to look at some of the facts which Scripture purports to relate. The great events which are described as taking place at the Fall, must have deeply impressed the first parents of our race. And the great recorded promise given to them of their recovery, through the seed of the woman, must have been constantly present to their expectations. It may, therefore, well have been that on the birth of Cain the first mother thought the promised seed was vouchsafed. Her recorded words seem to point to that—‘I have gotten a man from the Lord.’ And if this were her impression, it is likely that Cain himself would, as he grew up, become through her impressed with the idea that a great position was assigned him in religion. However this may be, as the first-born among many, he would naturally possess a superiority which

would be further advanced by his personal character. His occupation was tillage, which, in the infancy of art, would probably require as well as develope ingenuity, skill, and activity. It may be observed here, that Scripture, true to its mission, introduces men first in connection with religion; and it shows them involved in a controversy which was still substantially a continuation of that prior one between God and his creature Adam on the subject of faith and obedience. And if this be so, it would seem that, even to this day, the controversy has never moved from its original terms, for at the very first there was just the same conflict which still prevails between the two same sorts of mind, influenced by the same sorts of difference in feeling and opinion, which now as then divides brethren. At the end of days (query, Sabbath) 'it came to pass that Cain brought of the fruit of the ground an offering unto the Lord; and Abel, he also, brought of the firstlings of his flock and of the fat thereof: and the Lord had respect unto Abel and to his

## 44      Lectures on Early Scripture.

offering; but unto Cain and to his offering he had no respect.' \*

Now, why should this be? A very important answer has been given. It has usually been held that God Himself appointed to the first man his way of worship, and that, as part of it, He enjoined sacrifice.

If God had the gracious purpose of supporting man in his fallen condition, and of bringing him back to Himself, which Scripture from the first proclaims and by degrees developes, it is, to say the least, likely that He would give him for his help a knowledge of how He willed to be worshipped by him. If He designed to carry out this purpose in some particular way, as in the death of Christ; and if the value of this way to man would depend on man's acquiescence in it; it is further likely that the appointed worship would contain some allusion to this way. If we go to the New Testament and find the Apostles explaining that Christ was the fulfilment of all sacrifice for sin; if we find Him describing

\* Gen. iv. 3, 4, 5.

His own death as such sacrifice; if we find Him proclaimed by prophets in varied figure as the Lamb of God; if the old rites, divinely fixed, constantly bring out the same idea of pardon through a victim; if we find sacrifice initiating great religious epochs, as in the tent of Abraham, and at the ark of Noah; if we remember that the promise to Eve was that the woman's offspring should destroy sin; on all these considerations it becomes in a very high degree probable that this lamb which Abel offered in sacrifice, and to which God had respect, was not offered in an accidental way and without any special meaning, but that it was an appointed offering, and intended as the first link of that long chain which was to unite the promise to the woman, and its fulfilment in the passion and resurrection of Christ.

Thus, this offering, which, in itself, without this meaning, must be confessed to be strange and difficult to explain, at once becomes full of meaning and of the utmost propriety; and the required light is thrown upon

## 46      Lectures on Early Scripture.

the feelings of the brothers in offering, and on the judgment of God in accepting the one and in rejecting the other. This has been expressed in the following way:—‘Abel, in firm reliance on the promise of God and in obedience to His command, offered that sacrifice which had been enjoined as the religious expression of his faith; while Cain, disregarding the gracious assurances that had been vouchsafed, or, at least, disdaining to adopt the prescribed mode of manifesting his belief, possibly as not appearing to his reason to possess any efficacy or natural fitness, thought he had sufficiently acquitted himself of his duty in acknowledging the general superintendence of God, and expressing his gratitude to the Supreme Benefactor, by presenting some of those good things which he thereby confessed to have been derived from His bounty. In short, Cain the first-born of the Fall, exhibits the first fruits of his parents’ disobedience, rejecting the aids of revelation, because they fell not within his apprehension of right. He takes the first place in the

annals of Deism, and displays, in his proud rejection of the ordinance of sacrifice, the same spirit, which, in later days, has actuated others in rejecting the sacrifice of Christ.\* He has no opinion that in the sacrifice of the Lamb there is special meaning and value. He has not enough trust in God to obey simply. Instead of the bleeding victim—strange discordant sight, at a time when flesh was not used for food—he brings of the beautiful fruits of his husbandry. But it is an offering of Gherizim; an offering of the natural man, not of the spiritual man. It finds no favour. It could not; for where it seems to worship it rebels. And thus Cain in Jude's epistle† is placed by the side of Balaam, who broke religious duty from interest; and by the side of Corah, who broke appointed religious services from pride.

From all this it follows that there are and have ever been two sorts of religion among men. One which says, 'I have many blessings

\* Abp. Magee on Atonement, Disc. ii.

† Jude, ver. 11.

## 48      Lectures on Early Scripture.

from God; life, health, prosperity. I thank God for them. I have in many things failed to do what I know is right. I am but a creature; God is all powerful; He will overlook it.' The other sort of religion takes the matter up where the first leaves it; and adds, 'I am, indeed, weak; I am more—a sinner; God has appointed a way for me to escape from my sin; that way I therefore accept. Suppose reason does look at it in vain? Suppose I fail to see how the death of the great sin-offering shall produce these great effects for me? For that very cause my faith and my obedience find their work to do.'

It should be understood by the young Christian that our religion does not merely consist in coming to church; or in kindness and benevolence. It does not mean doing as much good and as little harm as one can; conforming to the general opinion and asking no questions. Worship and charity are parts and consequences of our system, but the essence of it is Christ; and if the above inferences are correct, it is clear that these



Scriptures, from the day in which they were first written, set out with a fixed plan which never changed—viz. to establish Christ in the faith of men; and the personal religion which has not that faith is not yet Christian religion—it is not yet what, according to Scripture, God will accept. It does not yet mean for its possessor safety, peace, restoration, happiness.

On the other hand, the believer in Christ may be assured that, though his religion will bring with it self-denial, surrender, struggles with his reason, his heart, his flesh—though it may in an uncongenial world cost him much, as it cost Abel, the first, or one of the first, believers in Christ—yet he may take all courage. Abel ‘being dead, yet speaketh.’ He tells us, as we remember the times which were then approaching, that the righteous, though they should be taken away in what seems untimely speed, are taken away from the evils which are to come. He tells us in his short holy witnessing, so violently stopped, that this life is not our rest, and that ‘the

50      Lectures on Early Scripture.

righteous hath hope in his death.' He tells in his memory, which endures to this day, as a witness and power, 'that the righteous shall be in everlasting remembrance.'

## VI.

IN following out the subject of the development of Scripture, a point is approached which is one of the most difficult in theology, and, after all that can be said on it, it will remain to many as much a difficulty as ever. The subject is God's treatment of the old world at the time of the Flood. The difficulty is how to reconcile that catastrophe with the character of God.

Now it may be made apparent that this catastrophe is not introduced into the narrative in any violent or irregular way; that it flows and follows regularly and reasonably as a consequence from the circumstances which go before it; that it might have been foreseen and predicted had there been experience to examine the causes which introduced it; that it is altogether in accordance

with God's general conduct and character as revealed in Scripture, and as observed in His providential government of the world; and further, that it is the sort of way in which we should ourselves act under such circumstances, and, in fact, the way in which we do and must act in some cases at present. At the same time, it seems that no reasoning, however fairly applied, would satisfy some persons on this point; for men are apt to take up strong general opinions in a very hasty manner, and to hold them fast, and also to interest themselves in constructing a character for God agreeable to themselves. But the truth is, that the interest of all lies in knowing how matters really are; and it can never answer any good purpose for us to fancy that God will act towards us and others in one way, when we find that Scripture and experience and reason all declare that He will act in another.

The steps by which the Deluge is approached have been frequently traced, and, as it seems, with much appearance of probability. It can be easily believed that, after

the death of Abel, Cain could not remain in that infant society which he had revolutionised, or in that home which he had filled with sorrow. No word is given in the narrative to paint the feeling of the first mother brought in sight of the first death among her children. No word tells whether to her grief was added the pang of feeling that her own first sin was the cause of all. It is not detailed what Adam felt at the outrage on his child and his home, or what he felt as the first offerer of sacrifice—which to him was a divinely-appointed, sacred, and most meaning institution—when he found his rites set aside and another system put up instead. These points are not touched on; for the transaction is described as between Cain and God—to whom man is ever in Scripture responsible. But we can understand that these feelings would be moving in those hearts; and that it would be necessary, for the sake of the home, the society, and the divinely-established religion, that Cain should depart. We read that God separated him from them, and that he went eastward, and there settled. Absent

54      Lectures on Early Scripture.

from the manifestation of God's presence, from the authority of the first parent, from the spiritual blessings which flow from sacrifice, he becomes the founder and patriarch of a race apart. Those who spring from him, like their parent, are skillful and ingenious. The first rudiments of art, science, and agriculture are worked out by them; and they first introduce novelties into the methods of living. They multiply rapidly. They spread wide. They are the possessors of outer material power. But now, let the question be considered, What would be their religious state—their relation to God—their condition as regards man's final destiny? Without true worship, which Cain had given up—without the true human head, Adam—deriving their life, education, and government from Cain—himself full of man's greatest weakness, want of faith, and want of obedience—self-seeking, proud, disappointed, disinherited, and with the tradition of the great crime clinging to his name; with his character in their natures; with his authority and ex-

ample around them;—what could his children and their children after them become?

Let it be remembered that now the spread of evil has some very powerful checks which then were wanting. Men are now divided into distinct communities, with rival traditions and interests, separated by nationalities, and secluded by difference of language: we do not all go mad together. No such separation was in existence then, where all are described as speaking the same tongue. Again, bad men are now speedily removed by death from the scene, and have not long opportunity for corrupting others; but it is related that life was then far more extended in duration: so that generation after generation would spring up, and the older generations would still be present on the stage, with all the power of their position and experience, to work their wickedness upon the young and the weak; and over all, that dark chief, Cain, still living, a monarch and a parent, revered and feared, in the unchecked sway of human will.

56      Lectures on Early Scripture.

And over him, and underneath all human forms, and through the whole texture of their society and personal life, would be Satan working, that chief of all rebel-will.

Let all this be considered, and it becomes evident that we have here an accomplished but thoroughly depraved society, full of danger and power of contamination—full of the elements of decay, self-destruction, and self-punishment.

But now return again to the original society from which Cain went out, and which is continued in the line of Seth. These tribes have a simpler life, perhaps, but they have the true traditions of worship, the true rule of obedience and of faith. They are conscious that upon these points there is between them and the Cainites a radical difference; and they note their conviction by the title which they assume. They call themselves by ‘the name of the Lord.’\* Our own experience of the way in which evil spreads,

\* Gen. iv. 26.



and of the fact that on strong evil and weak good being brought into contact men are generally found to sink to the lower level, will prepare us to understand that the proper preservative is to keep the two apart; and it is to be noted in the advancing Scripture that this plan of separation is one invariably and strictly enforced, and that the failure on man's part to apply it is constantly the cause of misery and ruin.

There was, however, at that time, as now, a cause at work tending to the approximation of severed populations. When we accept the account that man's life was longer at that early time than at present, it follows that the increase of population would then be extremely rapid. It is at this point that the apprehended danger arrives. The two communities have increased. Their waves of population have spread on both sides, until intercommunication commences. May it not be that the two great families have met, and that their meeting is pointed at in such words as these—'The sons of God saw the daughters

58      Lectures on Early Scripture.

of men that they were fair, and they took them wives of all which they chose.’\*

The separating barrier once broken down, the whole population, already with one language and one origin, would pour in and intermingle their tribes, families, and accumulated generations. Wild and lawless confusion would begin to prevail, and would gradually deepen, until all flesh had corrupted his way on the earth, and the many had lost religion and law and social restraint. The great primeval sin-sowing of Cain would thus have come to its harvest—his violence leading to universal violence—his self-chosen religion leading to this, that ‘every imagination of the thoughts of man’s heart was only evil continually.’†

It is at this point that a total destruction of this race of men is, by the narrative, made to occur. Should we have expected this as readers of the Bible? The answer is, Yes; for all through the Bible, when the same sort of

\* Gen. vi. 2.

† Gen. vi. 5.

causes go before, this same sort of calamity follows; and total depravity culminates at last in total ruin. Take as instances the cities of the plain totally destroyed; the natives of Canaan totally destroyed; Jerusalem totally destroyed; and all these leading up to the one great retribution after this life, when the finally impenitent shall be totally destroyed. But suppose one should say these are the rough notions of a savage nation—the Jews accounting for their cruel history by supposing themselves charged with a Divine mission to eradicate opposition to Jehovah. The answer is, This cannot be; for by the side of the judgment we always find mercy: Noah is rescued from the flood, Lot from Sodom, the remnant is brought back from dispersion, Christians are saved from the destruction of Jerusalem, and the true believer is from the judgment of the last day. And further, there is ever a voice in Scripture testifying to the same truth—‘As I live, saith the Lord God, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked: but that the wicked

60      Lectures on Early Scripture.

turn from his way and live.' 'I call heaven and earth to record this day against you, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing; therefore choose life.' 'He doth not afflict willingly, nor grieve the children of men.' 'He would have all men to be saved, and come to the knowledge of the truth.' 'He would not have any perish, but that all should come to repentance.'\*

But our own sense of right will tell us that there are times and cases in which mercy would no longer be in place; and further, if we have before us the idea of a judgment to come, it seems clear that there is a time when it is a mercy at last to stop the sinner in his course, that he may not heap up wrath against himself. For the sake of others also it becomes at last important that some should be removed.

We see enough, too, even now, of God's character, as it shows itself around us, and as we find it spread through the pages of

\* Ezek. xxxiii. 11; Deut. xxx. 19; Lament. iii. 33; Barrow, Sermon. XLIX.

Scripture, to feel that even in these times of wrath he remembers mercy; that if the evil generation of old was arrested in its wickedness, it was only that its misery might cease, and that goodness might afterwards become more possible; that it was not only better for God's government—that it was better for us, better for them, better in every way, that the waters should blot out for ever that tangled wretched problem of life which men could not solve aright; and that the Divine hand did not let loose the floodgates until the very day in which it would have been less merciful and unmerciful to keep them closed. Now, let it be supposed that on that day some human hand, pitiful towards man's calamity, but faithless as to God's wise dealing, had had the power to stop His arm as it let loose the waters of the Flood, and that old world, reprieved, had gone festering on. What would have been the consequence? All present systems of civilisation would have been impossible. For ourselves, the consequences would have

## 62      Lectures on Early Scripture.

been fatal. But let the question be considered as it would have affected them. Take a child spared from the catastrophe. It would have grown into youth; the horrible corruptions of the time would have laid hold on its innocent life, and polluted all its thought; it would have graduated in depravity, grown harder and harder, more and more wicked; it would then have corrupted and polluted others; until at last, after years equal to six or seven of our lives, it would have gone down into the grave to wait for judgment. Who would have wished it saved for such a fate? The impulse of our pity might desire it rescued; but the conviction of pity would own it well that it was buried beneath those unsparing but not unmerciful waters.

Surrounded, then, though it is with circumstances the most appalling, it still must not be forgotten that for all of us the Flood was merciful. From that day a new and important idea has been established in men's convictions. Every vestige of the ark, and

most vestiges of the great cataclasm, may long have passed away, but there remains something which can never be effaced; and that is the impression that our God will not acquit the wicked; but that at last judgment, sure, sudden, tremendous, will overtake unrepentant sinners.

## VII.

SUCH a conviction of the morality of retribution as that referred to above, handed down from generation to generation, may not present us with that highest view of God's character which it is the office of a different set of facts to reveal; but it is a solid foundation on which other work rises. For the whole system of Scripture becomes, to our apprehension, invested with the sort of stability which we suppose to be an attribute of the natural system of the world, so soon as we discover that the thread of cause and consequence pervades the entire arrangement of its facts; for whatever may be the revelations to which faith is admitted in individual cases, and however such revelations may supersede and excel ordinary processes of perception, a great number of persons, and probably the large majority, will always



be much influenced by considerations addressed to reason; and it is found, indeed, that the commonest prejudices which are taken up by them are based upon the supposition that Scripture is, in its fundamental plan, in some respects at variance with what sound reason or justice would require. If, then, it can be made evident, on closer examination, that the very reverse of this is, in fact, the case, and that the outlines of Scripture are drawn in the strictest accordance with those principles which have been engrafted in our nature, such prejudices must subside in proportion as the results of that examination are made clear. And though it is undoubtedly true that mere intellectual convictions will never produce active practical Christianity, yet it is certainly also true, that the absence of convictions of the whole system being in accordance with common reason, must be a great elementary difficulty in the way of the personal reception of the Gospel.

It is, therefore, a matter of much interest

## 66      Lectures on Early Scripture.

to endeavour to lay hold on such a view of the facts of the introductory part of Scripture, as will assist us in arriving at conclusions compatible with the attributes both of God and of man. It is interesting to be able to answer that first impulse which would raise itself in hostility against the great judicial acts of Scripture, by showing that instead of being arbitrary they are consequential, and that instead of being vindictive they are merciful. It is important to be able to pursue that impulse further back, and as it retreats into the vague position that, in some way, the course of things might have been arranged otherwise, so that man might have been insured against all the evils which have befallen him, to be able to meet it in that retreat, and to show it that man's power to sin is inseparably connected with man's power to be man at all; that an amount of grace or Divine interference which would have rendered it absolutely impossible for him to have fallen, would have been an interference which would, as far as we can see,

have altogether frustrated the ends of his creation, neutralised his probationary course, and reduced him to the ranks of animal life; that his fall was one contingency involved in the gift of his freedom; that his freedom was an act of the highest beneficence and self-surrender on the part of God; and that the evils which surround him are as necessary a result of his fall as are disturbances in the natural world results from a disarrangement of natural causation. And if to all this it should still be objected that God, who foresaw the results and yet set the causes at work, must still be considered as responsible for the system, the reply is this—that we must take the whole plan together if we would judge it fairly; and we must remember that the great leading truth involved in the volume is this, that God, foreseeing the abuse of His gifts, did not withhold them; foreseeing that His law would be outraged, did not spare Himself the infliction; foreseeing that the raising of the creature to the eternal prosperity He had assigned to him would cost

68      Lectures on Early Scripture.

Him an infinite sacrifice, yet did not on that account refuse to set the great chain of causes in motion, but in eternal exposition and vindication of His attributes, 'spared not His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all.'\*

And should there still linger a hesitation, arising from the remembrance of the Scripture conclusion that by no means all shall be final partakers of the benefits of Christ, it must be answered, that there is also much more to be remembered on this point, and chiefly this, that it is one on which Scripture withholds from us intentionally the means of forming an opinion, forbidding us to judge in the case of individuals, and turning away the attention from the speculative part of the subject to the practical necessity of our own personal preparation.†

It must be remembered, that nothing definite is described with regard to the future

\* Rom. viii. 32.

† Luke xiii. 22, and Alford in. loc. For Jewish view to which this was an answer, Maimonides, on Repent., chap. 3 and 5; Mishnah, Maccoth, Sanhedr. c. xi.

either of the saved or of the lost ; that it cannot be certainly known or even surmised with probability, whether anything past is in any way connected with man's present condition ; that it cannot be known whether it would be possible for those who shall not attain salvation to have found what would have been to them heaven among the redeemed ; whether there may not be in their nature tendencies which are only partly developed in their lives here, and which, though to man's eye they may appear venial and unimportant, may yet really contain the germ of total alienation and hostility to God. Who can undertake to assert that, after all, those who are decidedly opposed to the Gospel, and reject it—those who are totally filled with the spirit of the world, and increase constantly in following all wickedness, may not find hereafter, as they do now, in sin, both the misery, which shall be their punishment, and enough of attraction to make it their congenial occupation ? Who can say what the proportions of the numbers shall be—

what the exact arrangements of a tribunal whose decisions we are warned will take vast numbers by surprise, and reverse many human anticipations? Who can inform us whether there be any future use in the Divine economy of the universe, which even God's enemies may be made to subserve? And who can from our limited point of view undertake to say, whether, on a general inspection of the system of Divine counsels, as made known to us, the balance may not so incline that, upon the whole, it is better for the human race, and better for the universal system of Divine government, that things should be as they are described to us than that the opposite alternative should have been adopted, and that mankind should not have been created at all?

It is evident that, unless such questions as these could be decided, it must be impossible to form any conclusion with reference to God's plans upon this particular point of the future state of mankind. It is the point, more than most others, on which we can

gather no information, either from the world around or from observation of our own nature. It is also a point on which information might be extremely dangerous; for to know the exact realities of the future might not necessarily be an encouragement even to sincere Christians in a probationary state, or necessarily a check to wicked men while on earth. Such knowledge, too, might occasion anxieties and fears, callousness and desperation, in a degree which would seriously interfere with the conditions of this our time of trial, as those who have seen persons under the influence of very strong impressions of the sort may well imagine.

As this point is the very one which almost more than any other is kept back from us, even while sacred mysteries of the Divine nature and economy are so freely unfolded as we find them in revelation, we may regard this reticence as one among many proofs of the harmony which exists between the Scripture system and the prudent use of our reason; and we may accept it as our

72      Lectures on Early Scripture.

wisest course to rest content, that when all else which is revealed is proved to be well done on our behalf, this which is not revealed, and which it is fit should not be revealed, will be found whenever it shall be known—that is, whenever we are fit to know it—not less well done than the rest.



## VIII.

It has been suggested already, as regards the Deluge, that, after the subsidence of first emotions, true pity—that is, a pity founded on a complete understanding of the real interests of all those concerned—would have desired at the hands of God some remedy not less quelling than that great calamity to cause to cease man's sin and suffering.

It may also be observed, as regards the ark, that true piety would require that some such means should be found to carry over into a new world the accumulated spiritual treasure with which Noah could endow its future denizens. For what had Noah that he could take over with him across the waters into the new world? He had not only ordinances of the most sacred import, but also ideas full of vitality, and experiences which

## 74      Lectures on Early Scripture.

contained the essential results of the past age.

The vapours of sin were already thickening fast around the small remnants of true religion. A few more years, perhaps, and the faint light could no longer have lived in that corrupt atmosphere. For all that appears, Noah's family may have been the only remaining representatives of the faithful. The emergency described was evidently great, and it was one the arrival of which is clearly deducible from the causes to which it is ascribed. It may, therefore, be considered that the ark, independent of those typical affinities which it has with the Jewish, the Christian, and the Glorified Church, is also in a mere outer and dispensational sense an expedient, to say the least, not in any way inappropriate to the crisis at which the narrative introduces it.

It must be admitted, that one of the most awful scenes which Scripture presents to the imagination is the silent waste of waters beneath which lay a dead world. But as the

mind dwells on the idea of the Deluge, beneath which, as beneath one vast winding-sheet, was fitly concealed a corruption which could no longer be endured, the question arises with regard to that epoch thus disastrously closed, whether it is to be regarded as a part of the work of God which had completely failed ; and whether it is an instance of Divine policy which needed to be retracted and cancelled.

Those who have considered the subject will not consent to say this. Man had failed—a population was withdrawn from the stage ; but God had not failed. The Divine plans had not paused or wavered ; and though that single dark object floating on the silent tides of judgment might seem at first a very small remnant reserved out of so great a ruin, yet in reality the ark and its tenants represent an important step gained, and a successful advance in the spiritual history of our race.

To estimate rightly the position of Noah in spiritual history, we must once more take

into account the length of life ascribed to man at that time. If Adam's grandson lived for nearly a century after the birth of Noah; if Noah's own grandfather lived till just before the flood; if Noah's son lived to the time of Abraham—there will thus be only the link of one life between Adam and Noah, and one more connecting Noah and Abraham.

Let it be remembered, also, that the names given in Scripture before the flood are the names of persons who were contemporaries—patriarchs of the great religious family—a sacred hierarchy surrounded by believers and worshippers. At first these were numerous, but by degrees they would become fewer and fewer as the light grew fainter in that evil atmosphere.

Often must these great worthies have communed together on the holy mysteries of their faith, and on the growing tumult of sin which was rising round them. It would be a matter of fresh and personal knowledge to them how man had fallen; how sin meant the transgression of law; how Adam had been

tempted and deceived, and how the secret enemy of their race was still covertly working around. Consider how much was comprised in all this. Here was sin known as man's punishment; sin observed and felt as man's misery; sin's author discovered as man's real enemy; a promise of pardon assured; a way of pardon provided; a future life made evident; a ministry of prophecy \* and a ministry of preaching † inaugurated. Certainly here were the marks of a great religious progress made between the time when Adam, the natural man, was found hiding from God in the garden and that when Noah, the spiritual man, was hid by God in the ark—separated suddenly from all the evil which would have choked the life out of religion, and entrusted to plant in the heart of a new world those sacred truths which summarised the religious experiences of the past.

Nor was it only that the central doctrines of religion, surrounding the ideas of sin, death, judgment, pardon, rescue, and immortality,

\* Jude 14.

† 2 Peter ii. 5.

were already gained for man. Nor was it that the only additions to them were the holy institutions of ministry and sacrifice, which already pointed to and expressed Christ. The last man of the dispensation set in contrast against the first man, as regards their personal condition of soul, shows the importance and extent of the work which had already been done for human nature, which now in its fallen state of weakness had been brought by grace to accept the true position of our race, better than it did in its strength immediately before the fall; for Noah is described as led by God into eminent heights of faith and of obedience, which had been the very points where Adam had so utterly failed.

It seems, then, that if we look closely at the few transactions recorded at the beginning of Scripture, i. e. closely enough to distinguish from the mere transactions the principle on which they depend, we shall conclude that the Deluge, or some equivalent for it, was to be expected as the consequence and

complement of the events which had gone before.\* And further, that while on the one hand there was abundant reason to expect that such a world as that described should pass away, there was also not less cause to expect that the great truths, graces, and promises represented by Noah should survive it.

\* Origen. Hom. in Gen.

## IX.

THE events which are described as surrounding the Deluge are of a nature, undoubtedly, far removed from the ordinary course of our experience, and introduce a question which has, in some quarters, occasioned more difficulty than was perhaps necessary—the question of miracles.

The origin of much of this difficulty may be owing to indirect causes. It is a well-known and constant quality of the mind, that it receives readily, and with a sort of favour, ideas to which it is accustomed. As in action there is a tendency to do again what has been done before (which is the law of habit), so in thinking there is a tendency to expect that whatever has happened before will happen again (which is the law of probability); and when, instead of this, some new and unex-



pected action comes in and breaks the chain of continuity, it is regarded at first by the mind with disfavour, and there is an involuntary effort to reject it.

This, let it be remembered, is the statement of a general law of mind which is true in all sorts of subjects, and there is no doubt that, upon the whole, it is a beneficial and preservative quality, very valuable to us in many ways. But the question at the present moment is, how does it affect us when we take up Scripture? We sit down with habits of thought fixed, and with a rule of probability formed about certain subjects — viz. about what God does in the world of nature, and what He does among men; and these habits we have formed from what we have observed in our own experience, and have had related to us from the experience of others. Before many sentences are over, we come to a place in Scripture which presents an idea quite contrary to those to which we are accustomed, and which describes things in man, and nature, and God, of which we have no

## 82      Lectures on Early Scripture.

experience. At once this jars—it is improbable.

Now, there are several methods of decision by which the mind may meet difficulties arising in this way. It may be so unreasonable as to reject them altogether; and the word unreasonable may be well used of this summary method of dealing—for, after all, the same sorts of mental surprise are constantly assailing our habits of thought in other matters—as, for instance, in the discoveries of science; and no one would care to own that he had refused to accept these without looking into them, merely because they were not what he should have thought likely.

Another way by which this tacit resistance may be overcome is familiarity. The most extraordinary statements become at last so familiar, that they cease to excite any surprise, or raise any opposition, but only because they cease to make any impression at all. This, however, is certainly not a satisfactory way of setting at rest the difficulty.

There is a third way—the highest of all—

which is by being blessed with a faith so close in its allegiance to God, and so enlightened as to His character, that it has no difficulty in accepting anything from Him. In such a case there is a complete subjection of the individual will to the Divine will. It is not so much that there is a conscious effort of resignation, as that through the grace which reigns in the man, the whole soul is so assimilated to God that in a humble way, and according to the measure of his human power, he sees and wishes as God sees and wills; and under the influence of the Holy Spirit, like the harp among whose strings a wind stirs half-heard harmonies, so his soul vibrates in concord with these mysteries of God.

And there is yet one more way fit for ordinary use, and leading up to higher ends—fit for those who, though they have not gained, are desirous of reaching the heights of faith. The usual explanations of miracles may be ingenious, learned, and powerful, but the difficulty in applying them is this: they extend over so wide a surface of literature,

## 84      Lectures on Early Scripture.

embrace so many considerations, and require so much subsidiary knowledge if we would estimate their value, that they are out of the reach of many of those to whom they are addressed. We may, therefore, be thankful that argument is not the only way of solving these matters, but that the difficulty, when it is justly dealt with, disappears by the very way it came.

If Scripture has at first little weight against our impressions about the course of nature and providence, because these impressions are the result of observation and thought, let Scripture also be carefully observed and thought on. Let it, in its turn, be understood. Let men note that within its pages are contained, as well as in nature, laws and harmonies ; ways of divine dealing which may be calculated on ; principles which are unswervingly applied. Let this be persevered in, and, as the result, a new inner order will at last begin to develope its outline, and the student will find himself within the limits of a spiritual science, to which the mind may

give a willing allegiance, so that, by and by, if some one bring him a miracle as a difficulty, it will be no longer a difficulty to him. It will be no longer with him a question whether it will fit into an outer system. He has found that in the inner science it has its exact work, place, and value; and therefore, instead of being a surprise, it is even that which he would expect and require.

It is because he has been disciplined by such practice, that a divine does not find difficulties in theology on those points which have occasioned to some laymen the most perplexity; and if a few instances are quoted to the contrary, it must be said such men, though ecclesiastics, were not divines. They were scholars, critics, historians, mental philosophers, men of science, mathematicians—what you will. But their method was this. They drew their standard from their own special study. The habit of their mind based itself there, and by it they measured theology. Dealt with in such a way, theology has no fair trial; but dealt with as other subjects are

## 86      Lectures on Early Scripture.

dealt with — fairly and by development from within, instead of from a foreign standard of criticism—this holy science has nothing to fear.

So clearly convinced of this are its faithful students, that they are far from anticipating the day when the divine volume will be splintered to pieces by contact with physical science, or will melt under the solvent of criticism. They might, indeed, rather look forward to the time when an advanced theological science shall have ascended into heights of the Scriptures where analogies will be more clearly discernible, and in which it will be competent to a theologian to take up one of these points as a chemist would take up a rough mass from the ground, and, as he examines it, to say, this is a miracle—not an excrescence on the narrative, but part of a divine order, whose harmony and validity necessarily requires its presence.

But, after all, we are brought back to the sad thought that, suppose all this should happen thus, even then what difficulties will

be removed? For if there are difficulties in our subject, it is because there are difficulties in our hearts, and until the judgment hour reveals the great world of mystery now hidden from sense and soul, and all doubting shall become impossible, men will go on raising question after question, and the same question over and over again; not that they care much either for question or answer, but because it is a way, after the manner of the Gadarenes, of beseeching Jesus to depart out of their coasts.

## X.

IN considering miracles more controversially, there is one method of treatment against which we should specially be on our guard, since it is flattering to intellectual pride. This method professes to retain Scripture, but to reconcile it in all respects with ordinary experience—in short, to make it probable. It takes those parts of the volume which it does not like and explains them away. It has a little store of reagents under which the sacred narrative soon disintegrates; some parts disappear as allegories, others as mistakes of interpreters; more as errors in manuscript, or as spoken by the individual writer from himself. Difficulties are easily thus disposed of, and at last there remains as the result a word of God purged of all that could offend any one's incredulity.

There are some not ill-disposed men who



allow themselves to be led into this trap without understanding whither they are going; and that in their effort to escape minor difficulties, they have run against the greatest difficulty of all. For what is this system but to say, some parts of Scripture are from God, others from man; some parts are inspired, others not? In the very same letter of one apostle these two may occur, and every man may judge for himself which is which. Every one must separate by his own skill the divine from the human element in the Bible.

At this point comes in a sceptical objector, and says, 'A book cannot in any decent or intelligible sense be said to be inspired, or to carry with it the authority of being—scarcely even of containing God's word, if only portions of it come from Him—if the same writer in the same tone may give us, in one verse, a revelation from the Most High, and in the next a blunder of his own. How can we be certain that the very texts on which we most rest our views are not the human and un-inspired portions?'

To the biblical student, who has allowed himself to be placed in so false a position, such objections may be urged fairly enough, and he will further be subject to have this said to him : ' You have no right to abandon the doctrine and retain the deductions and corollaries which flow from it, and from it alone. ' You must not insist on making the superstructure survive the foundation, lest you become like those who refuse to give up possession of the property, though the title by which they hold it is admitted to be invalid.'

The more, indeed, the subject is considered, the more inadmissible will it appear to allow any compromise whatever with regard to the miracles ; for not only would any such surrender throw, as we have just seen, an uncertainty over the whole volume by permitting each person to decide individually as to what he will reject or receive—an act in itself totally inconsistent with the idea of a revelation authoritatively imposed by God—but also, together with the miracle, much that is important and even essential in the doctrine must

be surrendered ; for the miracles of our Lord Jesus Christ, whatever other purposes they may serve, are also important expositions of doctrine, and the great doctrine of His resurrection from the dead, with which so many important consequences are connected, is also the chief of miracles.

It may not be so inconsistent for one who is sceptical on the whole subject of revelation to hesitate in giving credit to the miraculous element contained in it. To him it is, among many difficulties, one difficulty more. Accepting the usual order of things as final and complete, any departure from it appears to him anomalous. But for a professing Christian to doubt miracles is extremely inconsistent ; for he has accepted as true a system of facts and doctrines with which miracles are not at all out of harmony ; and which, indeed, without miracles, could hardly either have occurred or have been communicated. For what indeed is the very idea of revelation at all, but the suggestion of a miraculous declaration of truth from God to man ; and if there were

## 92      Lectures on Early Scripture.

withdrawn from us every truth which Scripture asserts to have been imparted through the agency of miracles—if we had to give up every act described as having been done in consequence of or in connection with such miracles, how much of our Scripture would remain to us ?

The fact is, that the objections to the miracles proper overlook generally this—that if an objection to miracles be well-founded, it must be an objection to the miraculous element altogether ; and that such objection will have a far wider application than those who introduce it may at first suppose—indeed, can hardly stop short of the entire surrender of Scripture. And even if Scripture could be imagined as remaining when separated from the miraculous, it will perhaps be difficult to see what special claim it could then have to our attention.

Let the question then be asked, without referring to points connected with the relations between the finite and the infinite, what is the real meaning and value of the common

argument or prejudice on the subject of miracles, and it will be found that it depends upon the notion of their impossibility. This supposed impossibility, when looked into, is found, in its turn, to depend on the notion that miracles are contrary to experience. But there is obviously here an ambiguity in the use of this term experience; for if by miracles being contrary to experience is meant that they are contrary to *our* experience, that is evidently not conclusive against them; for it is not pretended by their believers that they happen now; but if, on the other hand, it is meant to imply that they are contrary to *all* experience, then it must be observed that such an assertion cannot be taken as argument, for it assumes as settled the very fact which is in discussion.

This argument of experience again resolves itself into a further one, deriving its force from impressions about that actual state of things which is commonly called the course of nature; for it is considered by those who use it that the more men know of natural

## 94      Lectures on Early Scripture.

processes, the more fully they become aware that these depend upon laws of an universal character. It is concluded that this universality is so complete that the departure from it, which is implied by the idea of a miracle, cannot be allowed as possible, and it is imagined that the more we know of the subject, and the further we penetrate into science, the more strong will this conclusion become.

Now, without pausing to enquire whether some connection in accordance with usual law between natural, i.e. ordinary processes in the external world, and those supernatural or extraordinary ones which are known as miracles, may not be among the secrets of science yet remaining to be discovered, let it be assumed that a miracle is, as completely as it seems, an interference with the usual law of nature, and let the difficulty which this notion of the inviolability of natural law raises be met—a difficulty which, if it be fully expressed, amounts to this, that God could not interfere with the regular action of these universal laws.

Now, this 'could not' must mean either a disability of power or a disinclination of will. If it be the former—if it be asserted that in the carrying forward of a plan like that of the redemption of man, described as so great in its scope, and as occupying in so high a degree both the sympathy and the personal interference of the Divinity—He would yet be precluded from interfering with those ordinary processes by which His blessings are secured to us in the natural world, even though he should do so in a very partial and limited degree, or in single instances, and though by doing so He would much help forward the success of His plan for securing to us spiritual blessings, then it necessarily must be the case that this inexorable law of nature is, in some way not explained, higher than God. The personal Divinity becomes, therefore, under such a system, a nominal expression—the real agency, the true Divinity, is the course of nature—that secret essential power which is above all, and which is thus immutable in its principles, undeviating in its

operations, and perpetual in its duration. And when men have arrived at this point, though their conclusions may be concealed from themselves under the phraseology connected with a personal Divinity, yet the real point at which they have arrived approaches very close to Pantheism.

It is against the perpetual tendency to recur to such a conclusion that the very introduction of miracles forms a salutary safeguard. The commencement of all new epochs must necessarily be a departure from established laws, and the only escape from this necessity is the supposition of an eternal series reducing the universe to an incessant evolution of cause and effect. The miracle forces upon us, in opposition to such views, the idea of a Divine personal agent, and thus assaults the Pantheistic idea which lies under the divinity of law.

Such are some of the difficulties which surround the notion that God *could not* interfere with the established order of things, so as to act by way of miracles; but if, on the other



hand, the suggestion be, not that there is a disability of power on His part, but a disinclination of will—a disinclination on the part of a God personally recognised to depart from His rules established for the government of the natural world, under any such circumstances as the Christian religion introduces—then it is evident that this notion arises from a feeling that Christianity is comparatively unimportant, that is, unimportant in comparison with the system of nature ; and a person holding such notions would, as a matter of course, object to miracles, just as one who, on the contrary, feels that the spiritual is superior to the material, would, as a matter of course, be predisposed to receive them favourably.

The real question, then, at this point seems to be a question as to the comparative value of the two systems of nature and grace. The balance has to be adjusted between time and eternity, body and soul, physical order and moral order ; and if it be concluded that the moral world and the eternal interests of the soul are of the greater weight, or of any very

considerable weight, then it is quite reasonable to suppose that in any such important epochs in the moral world as those described as occurring in several parts of Scripture—epochs affecting so highly the interests of man, and so deeply engaging the interference of God—some such miraculous incidents would occur as are described in Scripture, that is, if sufficient cause should appear for their introduction. And such cause is clearly present; for in this way better than in any other would the attention of men be attracted, in the first instance, to new declarations of the Divine will; those who actually beheld the miracles performed would receive at once most conclusive evidence of Divine interposition; the authority of the propagators of the faith would by these means be fully testified, and their work would be very rapidly advanced. The prospect of producing such results would sufficiently account for the introduction of miracles, and if the results occurred they would justify that introduction. On turning to Scripture to ascertain what effects were

in fact produced by miracles, we observe that they precisely fulfilled such offices as have been described, viz., arresting attention, testifying to authority, conciliating regard, and affording proofs to those who witnessed them of the most summary and conclusive kind.

At the same time, it is not less observable that there is no undue stress laid by the Scripture writers on the miraculous element. These signs and wonders are not, as a casual reader might from the condensed form of the narrative at first suppose, scattered lavishly over the whole area of Scripture history. They are found occurring only at rare intervals. They are grouped around certain prominent and central epochs, inaugurating revivals and new developments of the great scheme. They are wrought also by persons who are chiefly in a typical or representative position, and generally under circumstances of peculiar solemnity, and with a view to important and connected results.

There is a similar parsimony observable in \*

## 100    Lectures on Early Scripture.

the acts themselves, which are neither frequently repeated nor the strongest display of power possible under the circumstances. There is in them very generally a moral purpose at the time, and also a further typical meaning for the future, and they bear in many respects a proportionate resemblance to the events with which they are connected, as in such cases, for instance, as the thundering, lightning, and sound of trumpet at the giving of the Law on Sinai—the feeding of multitudes at the ministry of Christ—the darkness at the hour of His death, and the effusion of tongues at the succeeding Pentecost.

The writers of Scripture, it must be added, though in the position of having themselves derived very strong impressions from the miracles, are not on that account found mistaking the weight of their evidential value. One of the remarkable features in Scripture is the calm and unimpassioned simplicity with which these extraordinary events are recorded by them, and the very sparing reference which they make to them in their addresses to those

who had not been eyewitnesses of their performance. But while they do not attempt to press upon others with undue force these events transcending human understanding, they evidently do not feel the slightest hesitation as to their reality and significance. They speak of them with unaffected and brief solemnity, as of wonders requiring neither explanation nor defence. They do not betray a suspicion that any improbability can attach to them. And, indeed, it may be, that to men of very deep spiritual insight the appearance of conflict between the miraculous and the natural, which creates embarrassment to some others, has altogether ceased. They may find themselves in presence of a new system of realities, in which the wonders of Scripture, being referred to their true standard, may at once be felt by them intuitively to be part of a Divine harmony, of which the order of nature itself is only a portion.

In addition to these probabilities in favour of miracles which are connected with adequate notions of the value of revelation, there are

## 102    Lectures on Early Scripture.

also probabilities which attach to them when Scripture is viewed in comparison with other new systems; for, if miracles are objected to as unlike the course of events, it must be remembered that all commencements and special epochs are from their nature of necessity thus different, although they may perhaps be parts of a higher law. It may also reasonably be expected that very strange events should be accompanied by unusual circumstances. And it is only in a special sense, after all, that it can be said that the law of nature is interfered with by the miraculous; for the law of nature is a system in which God works mediately by means of natural agency, but Scripture is a totally different system, in which a new agency is introduced—that is to say, a system, in which God works immediately and by special interference. So that Scripture professes to be, not a part of the natural system, carried on by the same agency, and amenable to its laws, but a totally distinct system, dependent on principles of its own. For, after all, the words ‘Law of Nature’ only mean

the plan God adopts in dealing with common affairs, and, as the System of Grace means the plan He adopts in a very special emergency, there is no reason to suppose that His course in the two cases should be identical, but the reverse; for in the latter case the whole system may be expected to be lifted up into a higher sphere, where an orderly series of powers works above usual course, because their end is above usual course. And, indeed, if it be strange that the Gospel ends should be thus brought about, it would be stranger still if they were brought about in any other way; and the only answer which can be given on this subject by the adversary is that one which rests on the supposition that no new agency can possibly be introduced, which, as has been said, is in its form an assumption of the point to be proved, and in its substance leads to the conclusions of Pantheism.

But while the orthodox view is called on for its defence by those who question the miraculous element in Scripture, it must not be overlooked that the objectors themselves

occupy a position by no means free from difficulties. Thus, for instance, it is as well known to us as anything can be that there is in man a power of interfering in an infinite variety of ways, according to the dictates of his own will, with what would otherwise be the course of nature, and that by such interference he can in some cases produce very great changes—as in the change in the dwelling and appearance of plants and animals, amounting in some cases to a complete transformation; or in changes in the restoration of the body from the effects of disease and accident; or in many other things which might be named, so wonderful in appearance, even to other men unacquainted with the processes by which the results are produced, as to appear almost beyond belief, and as partaking of the miraculous.

Now, if it is to be said that such a power as this possessed by man is independent of and above what is called the order of nature, how can there reasonably be denied to God the possession of a similar power? Is there



not rather an inference that, since He who has made us in His own image has endowed us with this capacity, there will also be found a capacity similar in sort, though higher in degree, in His own nature, which He will exercise, like ourselves, on fitting occasions, as, for instance, on occasions connected with amending and improving the existing course of things? But if it is to be said that this power possessed by man, instead of being distinct from, is itself part of the order of nature, the point of the objection seems already removed; for then it is allowed that such interferences are not breaches of that natural system on which so much stress is laid. And if it be rejoined that there is still an essential difference between such efforts of human will and the efforts of Divine will implied in the miracles, it becomes the part of the objector to show in what that difference consists; for instance, what is the nature of the difference between (say) the most striking and rapid effects produced by such agency as electricity in paralysed subjects, and the

effects produced in similar cases under strong impressions of the power of Christ. For perhaps, after all, the more closely these things are looked into, the more probable it may appear that there are points at which the order of nature so called approaches very close to the miraculous.

It should further be weighed that the commencements of things must in their nature necessarily be miraculous.\* Take, for example, the first creation of man, which cannot be accounted for in any other way, unless we assert a perpetual existence of nature (which is rather a phrase than a reason); and if this be so, then it is found to be the case that miracles, instead of being, as was supposed, essentially unconnected with the present order of things, are even essentially a part of it.

The observations which have thus far been made are addressed to the question, whether miracles can be considered possible—that is, to the general presumptions against

\* Bp. Butler's Analogy, part ii. chap. ii.

them, and their answers. The question subsequent to this is, Supposing the presumptions against miracles so far removed as to render the idea of them admissible, what positive evidence is there for concluding they did, in fact, occur? On this point there is but little difficulty, for the Scriptures will be found so arranged as to give to the inquirer the evidences which may be reasonably required; and, indeed, if the usual criteria of evidence be applied, it will be found that it would have been difficult so to frame their pages as to afford, under the circumstances, fuller and more conclusive testimony than that which they convey.

It is true that some have considered a miracle as being in itself so improbable that no amount of testimony can entitle it to credit; but that improbability arises either from what has been handed down to us about the uniformity of the course of nature, or from our own observation of it. If from the former, on what reasonable principle is it that testimony when speaking *against* is to be

entitled to credit, while testimony speaking *in favour* is not to be heeded, even though attending circumstances should lend it additional weight? If from the latter, on what reasonable principle is it that the evidence of our senses as to what we see now is to be conclusive to such an extent as to shut out from credence men recording the evidence of their senses as to what happened at a very remote time, and under circumstances very peculiar, and very different from those under which we now live?

Upon the whole, then, the just course when we approach the miracles appears to be this\* —to consider first carefully the meaning of Scripture in the particular case, that we may not attempt to charge the narrative with more than it seeks to convey; but when once it is clearly established that a miracle is intended, then to accept it fully and unreservedly, without, on the one hand, attempting dogmatically to define its limits, and without, on the other, attempting to ex-

\* Keil's Comment. on Joshua, chap. x.

tenuate its marvels; confident of this, that, however difficult it may be to us now to reconcile this wonder with our own experience, yet that the order of nature out of which we get our experience is only an expression of the usual personal action of God, whose sustaining hand is always engaged in His universe; so that though we may make use of the term Law, there is, in fact, no other power giving it stringency but only His will in each case; and that if, as we believe, Christianity is part of His will, and the highest part of it, then, whenever under that system acts of a novel character are on any emergency required, He will certainly afford them, whether such action on His part may be called a breach or, more correctly, a part, of His law of nature.

## XI.

GREAT interest naturally surrounds the introduction of the new era after the Flood. It would be expected that the first incidents recorded concerning this period would be of a very significant character; that they would introduce or in some way refer to that which should be the leading idea of the approaching dispensation, and that they would in some way link together the present and the past, carrying forward into the new world those essentials of religion which were destined to survive the great destruction of the period which had closed. And exactly that which one would expect is, in fact, found. The many secular matters which an ordinary writer would be tempted to introduce are all passed by in silence. There is nothing recorded which would gratify the national vanity of the Hebrews, or stimulate their national

ambition. Scripture is true to its assumed mission. The holiest ideas are the root from which the narrative develops itself. Religion is everywhere predominant. Principles of construction totally different from those which prevail in all other histories are here recognised and undeviatingly applied.

Let it be observed that the very first thing recorded is the performance of sacrifice. Let the import of this very first act be observed. Let it be remembered that we have in sacrifice a divinely-appointed rite—a way given by God Himself, through which He would pardon sin, and by which He would lead man gradually to understand the fulness of his coming deliverance in the one great sacrifice of the Cross. The first departure from the faith in the first apostate began, we concluded, at the rejection of sacrifice. That was the one act which indicated alienation from God, and led by natural, perhaps necessary, sequence to the long train of ills which followed it. Observe, then, how solemnly full of meaning it is when the first man of the new

## 112    Lectures on Early Scripture.

world, in behalf of all who were his, as the great dispensational chief, and also as the great natural father of all who should come, is found inaugurating the new era by this comprehensive act, and accepting it as the true religious expression of the relation between God and men, and as their appropriate way of approach to Him. However nations may since have diverged from this point, whatever combination of causes may have alienated their allegiance, the first foundation stone of this renewed world is here laid in a deliberate typical expression of acceptance of the doctrine of pardon through the blood of the victim.

Observe, also, that it is described as being consequent upon this that God was well pleased; that it is as a result of this that He reveals Himself to man; and that the tone of Scripture already is, that the blood of the victim is the seal of the covenant.

And let it be noted further, that while as an answer to that sacrifice He gives assurances to all those fears which must have beset man



in the ark, promising him security for his labour, uninterrupted seasons, safety from a similar calamity, He also throws a special importance around the thought on which sacrifice depends—namely, the value of life, and the meaning of blood. Among a series of Divine utterances of the most general and comprehensive character, there is suddenly introduced this one forbidding the partaking of blood—which is specific and technical—a ritualistic observance which would be quite out of keeping with those grand promises by the side of which it occurs, were it not that it is itself so closely connected with the grandest promise of all—the bruising of the serpent's head by the woman's seed; in other words, the first and final sacrifice of Christ.

As we advance into the history, we find that there is a close resemblance—though one not, perhaps, at first apparent—between the outlines in this new dispensation and in that which had gone before it. The race is in each case first comprised in the individual:

## 114 Lectures on Early Scripture.

God sees all in the one, and makes over first to Adam, then to Noah, a viceroyalty over the earth and creature-world. As there is in the first dispensation an apostacy beginning with the act of the son of Adam, so there is a similar apostacy in the second also, beginning with the son of Noah. As there is a gradual depravation ending in ruin in the one, so there is the same, ending in dispersion, in the other. Thus the Scriptures are constantly offering instances of that unity of results, concealed under apparent differences, which are in nature found to be ever characteristic of God's dealings.

In estimating the conduct of the sons of the Patriarch, it is desirable to understand what was the position which Noah occupied in our then new world. Some years had passed already; men were rapidly multiplying into a community. At its head, undoubtedly, was the great Patriarch—a person of extraordinary personal character—one who had carried out an enterprise requiring immense resource, perseverance, and power of over-

coming obstacle in man and nature—one who, in a human way, was the preserver of his race: further than this, Noah was one who stood in the relation of parent to every living soul. All creatures had been made over to him; all men sprang from him. The influence of personal character, gratitude for past preservation, filial reverence—all these claimed for him a high position: but all these were absorbed in his higher functions, for Noah was not only the historical, the providential, the parental head of our race—he was also, for the time then present, its great religious head. The sacred knowledge of the past world was deposited with him. He alone could instruct in the religion, the morality, the rites which had been at first made known to Adam, or had afterwards been gradually arrived at by the servants of God. He was eminent in the graces of the spiritual life—faith, and obedience. He had been the forerunner of the new world, preaching righteousness and repentance immediately before the Flood. He had been specially

warned by God of the impending ruin—specially instructed how to avoid it—specially helped and preserved. He was the representative, on man's side, in the covenant with God. He was still gifted with the spirit of prophecy. He was the great offerer of sacrifice—in a word, he was the typical high priest of that dispensation. Let all this be borne in mind as we come to enquire concerning the sin of Ham.

Whatever may be the exact force of the passage about Noah's vineyard—and it has been supposed full of typical meaning—this is clear—that Ham's conduct was the exact opposite of respectful and reverential. If we regard Noah as a father, he was a father insulted and ridiculed in the worst way by his son. If we go on, and regard in him the great priest and personification of religion, in him religion was ridiculed and despised by Ham.

As, in Cain of old, self-will, encouraged by want of faith, led to disobedient refusing of the appointed sacrifice; so now in Ham it led to despising the appointed sacrificer.

This man, thus greatly offending, is by Noah, the prophet, announced as cursed; and we see Canaan his son especially marked out as included in the curse. There was an obvious reason for this. It was important that the Israelites, who were summoned to expel the strong nations of Canaan from the Land of Promise, should understand that these nations were of a doomed race—one over which they would surely prevail in war, and one with which it would not be safe to connect themselves in the ties of alliance and amity.

And further, it should be remembered on the subject of this curse, that, when it is said to a man or a nation on behalf of God, 'You are cursed,' it does not necessarily mean that by some overbearing agency which shall be brought into action, the curse will be wreaked. It may mean 'there is that within your character and conduct which will of itself work out this curse.' It seems to be the case, as illustrated in the history of the Cainite race, that certain qualities inevitably lead to ruin. We are, indeed, in the limited

sphere of our individual lives, constantly observing character and estimating its tendencies; and we very commonly anticipate that some particular vices or failings will bring upon those who fall under their influence distress, discredit, loss of health, or the like, as the case may be. From our own experience of the results in similar cases, we commonly are in the habit of declaring, when we observe that a person is acting in a vicious, imprudent, or evil manner; that such dangers are imminent: but it would never be supposed that it is therefore to be concluded we desire these results to follow, or that we ourselves are in any way implicated in their production. In the same manner, it is not necessarily to be supposed, when a Divine judgment is declared against the sin of Ham or others, that such judgment indicates a special interposition of God to bring it about. On the contrary, any breaking of His laws, which are of eternal obligation, may evidently be considered of itself the real cause of the curse.

And it could not be otherwise, unless the foundations on which the whole moral structure of things rests were relaid. The tendencies of races, as well as families and individuals, to certain courses of conduct, visible, in some degree, even to ourselves, are doubtless clearly discerned by the all-searching eyes of Him with whom we have to do. The conditions of their future career—which even sagacious men may to a certain extent anticipate—are by Him doubtless discovered with the minutest accuracy. The declaration, therefore, of Divine hostility is, in fact, addressed to that hostility in man which, though it may be latent to us, is manifest to God. A curse from Heaven is in the nature of a judicial sentence. It presupposes necessarily a failure in conduct so great as to be fully adequate to the sentence; it is founded necessarily on principles of unimpeachable justice—nay more—of benevolence also—when benevolence is understood in its widest sense as regarding universal interests—and therefore any suppositions or suspicions derogatory

to the attributes of God have no ground on which to rest. And if, at the first glance, an impatient notion may arise that there is the appearance of inequality in the way in which the Scriptural system is applied; that notion must disappear so soon as it is observed how completely the record makes allowance for those principles which it describes as so fully efficacious, and whose meaning is comprised in the word 'Faith.'

- Turning to another aspect of this great problem, we find, in the account which is given us by Scripture, an illustration of a rule which is found very generally true in life—where we observe, that a bad servant will usually make a bad master, and that a bad son will usually make a bad father; for the qualities of self-restraint, forbearance, respect, reverence, trust, and obedience to man and God are, in reality, strength, and not weakness. It is the opposite conduct which shows moral debility. Ham and Canaan, and those who are like them in character, could only be tyrants or slaves in



life, and bigoted or indifferent on religion. From the loins of Ham there sprang nations like Egypt—rapidly formed, rapidly decaying; but they achieved neither civil happiness nor true religion. Their systems were inimical to man and God. They were founded in one who was without respect for man or God; and it has been considered by some that, wherever the descendant of Ham is still met, there is the same nature found in him—and which is itself slavery. However this may be, it is to be noted how very different from this is the pattern set us by Christ; who, by example and word, declared allegiance to all due authority, and loving reverence to God. And we may be sure that, if instead of servitude we would have freedom, it is only by faithful obedience to Christ's truth that we can gain it, and then 'the truth will make us free.'

## XII.

THE blessing and command of God to Noah and his sons, had been this:—‘Be fruitful and multiply, and replenish the earth.’\* The word translated ‘replenish,’ is powerful. It means ‘to fill completely in all its parts, as anything fills up an empty space.’ It is used again in the first chapter of Genesis, where the blessing to the living creatures of the waters is:—‘Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the waters in the seas,’ i.e. ‘pervade them everywhere.’ It is also used in the fortieth chapter of Exodus, where it is written that ‘The glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle;’ that is, a brightness, too great for man to gaze on, filled it in every part. The blessing, therefore, contained for the new tenants of the earth in the word ‘replenish,’ was that they should occupy it, spread themselves over its

\* Gen. ix. 1.

whole surface, and bring it all into subjection and use.

In this, as in like cases, the blessing given expressed not only God's approval, but His plan and intention, His command, and His provision of the means for carrying it out. It was the declaration of man's mission and the Divine policy. This will of God for man—made known through those to whom it was first given—would evidently come to be understood as a law of action for the new world. It would be handed on to succeeding generations ; would be understood generally as man's commission from Heaven ; and would be regarded as imperative in proportion as individuals, or bodies of men might recognise the ties of Divine allegiance. The great religious and patriarchal chief, Noah, would doubtless be found making it his work to encourage and carry forward the enterprise, and to urge his offspring to go forth and replenish the newly-restored world, and the two of his sons whom we find described as regarding him with deep reverence—Japhet,

and Shem—would give all the influence which they as subordinate chiefs might possess, to induce the rising population to accept the duty. We have here then a moral impulse towards displacement of population evidently at work; and, if we turn to the narrative, we are at once met by traces of its action.

At the beginning of the eleventh chapter of Genesis, we find indications of a general movement. 'And the whole earth,' it is written, 'was of one language and of one speech. And it came to pass, as they journeyed from the east, that they found a plain in the land of Shinar, and they dwelt there.' We watch that mighty wave as it rolls slowly on, and ask if it will reach its destined limits unchecked, or if there will intervene any disturbing cause which will arrest its progress and dissipate its forces.

As we regard it, we observe that here—as everywhere in man's history—there is a competing principle found developing itself; which, as it comes into action, ranges itself in opposition to the Divinely-marked plan of human

life. Here was a body of people which must be considered as being conscious that it was part of God's design that they should thus move forth to replenish the whole earth; and whose movement cannot be considered as independent of, and unconnected with, that command. If, however, we would understand the motives which would be sure to influence them at such a crisis of their history, we must also bear in mind that, though it must ever eventually be man's true success to obey the commandments of God, yet that, here as in many other cases, the act of obedience would involve a certain amount of difficulty and trial at the time; for, wherever man may happen to be placed, the mere act of thus going forth is in its nature an arduous task. It implies necessarily several things. The individual gives up some benefits; breaks some ties; incurs some inconvenience and danger both for himself, for the substance which he takes with him, and for those who accompany his expedition. In addition to this, there were difficulties peculiar to the circumstances

of that time, which would tend to introduce a special obstruction to the carrying out of the Divine command. In small communities, the departure of considerable bodies is a source of political weakness, and seriously affects those who remain; so that, not only would there be the general disinclination for the effort on the part of the individual himself, but also, in this case, there would be a tendency on the part of others to interfere with the departure. There are strong traces too in the narrative that a new power—analogueous to that of Cain under the old dispensation—was already beginning to arise; and that influential minds were already beginning to lay the foundations of extreme despotisms.

Viewed with relation to these considerations, the plain of Shinar is in reality a place of conflict—the struggle is between two plans of human action—one representing the views of Noah, and of Shem and Japhet—its principle being that, when God has spoken, man's duty is to trust and to obey; that when He has said, 'Go forth and replenish,' that

becomes man's work, and that no ulterior motives are to deter him from its execution: the idea, on the other hand, of those who might seek to keep men together—either for the sake of the power which they were enabled themselves to wield through the instrumentality of the accumulated masses, or because they were unwilling to accept any system which emanated from the patriarch—would be to prevent all dissolution of existing ties; to keep all bound together under present leadership; and to confine power to the hands of those who might regulate the central mechanism. And this idea would present attractions for those who, though they might have no prospects of leadership, yet preferred the conveniences of their existing position to the seemingly uncertain benefits which might arise from obedience to the plan of going forth in accordance with the Divine command. The opposing plan would be substantially this:—‘Let us fix ourselves here. Let us erect a metropolis, and make this the one great source from which all men may be influenced, and to which they may constantly

turn. Let us make us a name, that we be not scattered abroad upon the face of the whole earth.'

Beneath these outer conditions would be presented to that generation the same choice of conduct, the same trial of faith, which Adam had to pass, and which all must pass. There is, on the one hand, that which is clearly God's will; on the other, that which seems to be profitable, though opposed to God's will. If man could have had his way on the plain of Shinar, and founded this central empire, it would have been the root of tyranny and misery—impeding the development of the race. Beginning in opposition to God—carried on in the same spirit unchecked from without—absorbing good into itself, as evil had already done in the days of Cain, it would have lost sight by degrees, of all those rudiments of religion and law which were preserved in Noah that it might be developed in the new soil; and it would have reproduced fully that condemned epoch in which the earth had been filled with violence. This impending danger was fore-



seen, and pointed at in the Divine motive given in the text, 'And now nothing will be restrained from them which they have imagined to do.'\*

The policy of modern times, instructed by experience, has always viewed with apprehension the accumulation of vast power in the hands of one agency, and, regarding the mutual reaction of independent communities as one of the great safeguards of society, has set itself to bring about results similar to those which would necessarily attend the plan described in the Mosaic narrative. That plan had for its object to prevent men banding themselves together in one mass; to break up their false unity, that in the fullness of time a true unity might be given them in its stead. And this result is produced by the process of separation already used in removing Cain—in bringing out Noah—and which is to have still further illustrations as the history advances. The moment unity of language should be so far broken up as to prevent communication between the different

\* Gen. xi. 6.

tribes, the hopes of universal dominion must, for the time, end; a principle of mutual repulsion would be at work; men would go forth in different bands, according to their tongues, and the power of cohesion would cease. 'Go to, let us go down, and there confound their language, that they may not understand one another's speech. So the Lord scattered them abroad from thence, upon the face of all the earth, and they left off to build the city; therefore is the name of it called Babel (i. e. confusion).' \*

But now, let it be asked, in whom had originated this plan, which would, if successful, have raised a human power into the central throne by setting aside the Divine ordinances? The answer brings out in a remarkable manner, the unity of design which pervades the sacred pages. The plan originated in those who had from the first despised religion and rejected obedience in their early outrage against Noah. It originated in the family of Ham. Cush was the first-

\* Gen. xi. 8, 9.

named son of Ham, and Nimrod was the son of Cush. 'Nimrod,' the narrative relates, 'began to be a mighty one in the earth.' 'And,' it adds, 'the beginning of his kingdom was Babel in the land of Shinar, and out of that land he went out into Assyria and builded Nineveh.'\* The meaning of the name 'Nimrod,' is 'rebel;' and he who bore it lived, as Cain had lived, in opposition to God. His power was dependent on the breaking of the beneficent law which God had laid down for man. He gained by frustrating their blessing. He gained by their loss. He was, next after Cain, the great early despot and oppressor of the race, and Babylon which he founded has ever continued in Scripture the expression and type of the power which he represented—the enslaving power of this world as opposed to the liberating power of God. The historical Babylon, as long as it existed, will be found to have ever been the great rival of revealed religion, seducing, tyrannising, captivating the people of God. And

\* Gen. x. 8, 11, *marg. ref.*

## 132    Lectures on Early Scripture.

after its removal from history it will be found still present in figure, even to the end of Scripture,\* as a mystical representation of the great antagonist of the Gospel.

Let these points, then, be summed up. We have seen revelation as man's light after the Fall. We have seen an attack made upon it in the outrage on Abel; and we have found in Cain a hostile system separated from it and ending in misery and ruin at the Flood. We have seen revealed religion again planted in Noah, and again attacked by Ham—the worldly system again formed and again broken up at Babel. But the strife is not yet over. Already the lists are once more preparing for a new conflict. On the one hand, the walls of Babylon and Nineveh are rising: empires, founded on worldly principles by the children of Ham, and which in after-history will be the great opponents of God's people, are forming. On the other hand, already from within their dangerous neighbourhood, from Ur of the Chaldees, one is under grace withdrawing

\* Rev. xvii. xviii.

himself unto Haran—a simple man of the race of Shem—taking with him Abram his son, the future father of the faithful. Thus the two powers are again at issue—their forces are marshalling—forces unequal in our eyes, but not in reality unequal, for great though the powers of this world appear to fallen man, yet in faith, humility, and obedience are contained the forces which overcome the world.

Even at this early stage in the narrative we can already discern some of the benefits coming from the division of language. The sons of Eber will emigrate into the sacred land. They will find there the tribes of Canaan, the Hamites with their self-arranged religion, their cruelty and licentiousness resulting from it. But there can no longer now be the rapid fusion of the two into one mass which had spread corruption through the old world; difference of language will for a time keep them apart—will long impede communication, and constantly witness against evil. The races will not again fully intermingle; the

streams may mix but they will be separable; when the Hebrews fall away they will feel it to be a falling away, and will through grace rise again. The past rebellion will be present to their memories. Whether in Egypt or Canaan, they will know that they are surrounded by the opponents of God's will, and by the frustrators of His blessing. These feelings will not die out; centuries after, they will be so fresh that allusions to them in their sacred psalms will be current. Thus, for instance, 'He made a way to his indignation, and spared not their soul from death, but gave their life over to the pestilence. And smote all the first-born in Egypt, the most principal and mightiest in the dwellings of Ham, but as for his own people he led them forth like sheep. He brought them out safely that they should not fear.' \*

These things are not altogether archaic. They form an essential part of the progressing system. They enable us to understand what

\* Ps. lxxviii. 51. See also Ps. cvi.

would not otherwise be clear—how it is that there is the constant antagonism between Israel and the Hamite races. They explain to us the righteousness of that rule, otherwise so difficult to understand, viz. the strict and total separation which God required in His Hebrew servants from all surrounding nations; for they show these as the slaves and instruments of that great hostile power which first caused man's fall, and seeks ever still to impede the work of his restoration.

But these reflections have even yet a more immediate bearing. They explain that the conflict is still going on which divides men as St. John divided them—into children of God and children of the Devil, and inform us that beneath many pomps and vanities—many aggregations of power in its varied forms—the influence is lurking which would enslave the soul and rob it of its blessing—the right to inherit the earth. These things teach us, too, as we look back through the long vistas in which the promise has developed itself, that true peace, true happiness, is only to be

## 136    Lectures on Early Scripture.

found by keeping in the way which God has laid down for us to walk in ; that all compromises, short cuts, and pleasant restings, which break into a clear duty, fail and lead straight away from our rest ; and they encourage us to gather up our souls under the gracious leadership of Christ to do that work which is the special work of all who have entered into covenant with God in Christ—to walk as Abel, Noah, and Abraham walked—doing battle against the world, and self, and Satan ; that, following them in faith and patience, we may hand on the truth for others, and ourselves inherit the promises.



## XIII.

THE words, 'In thee shall all the families of the earth be blessed,' which stand forth as the divine promise and prospect placed before Abraham at the time of his call, give an insight into the scope and purpose of the entire narrative. In the preceding periods the family of Seth has been seen separated from the family of Cain. Noah the faithful has been separated from the wreck of the old world. Now once more a religious centre is about to be formed; but the barriers which protect the Church from the world will this time have increased in strength, and the principle of its vitality will be less easily assailed.

In previous epochs much of man's error had arisen from efforts to realise true instincts by false methods. Seduced by the counsels of reason, the dictates of faith had been un-

## 138    Lectures on Early Scripture.

heeded by him ; and each succeeding fall had, as its consequence, left his life abridged of a part of those privileges which had formed the original endowment of his nature. As the consequence of one lapse he had lost length of life—as the consequence of another unity of language. But, even in the deprivation, there had been a concealed purpose of mercy ; and the final restoration of his attributes in their most perfected form had been the object in view when they were temporarily suspended.

As the dawn of this new dispensation breaks, it finds man in a state on the first appearance almost hopeless, but, in reality, judging by the test of past experience, not unfavourable for the coming change. The race is broken up into nations separate in language, retaining but indistinct and fading traditions of the true religion, which are intermingled with the germs of rapidly rising superstitions. But, though, in this condition, there is necessarily implied an antagonism to the revealed faith, it is an antagonism weakened by disunion ; for the oneness of speech and length

f life which had given to past combinations against the truth such fatal facilities, are now lost. It is under these circumstances that the Call is made to occur. One man is chosen—he is separated from his father's house, from his tribe, from his country. He is brought out into a land where he finds himself among strangers. Promises of God are made to him. He is assured that he is to become a great nation, blessed and protected. But it is at once in the outset intimated that these promises are not made to him, merely for his descendants' sake or for his own, but that the object in view is to render him a channel of blessing to the whole world. In him shall all the nations of the earth be blessed. These words contain the key to all the future plan, and they justify and explain its incidents; for, the real degree of man's want and the full extent of God's supply for it once admitted into the calculation, the various parts of Scripture begin to fall into their place before the mind, and the unity of the system from that time unfolds itself.

If we advance beyond the personal history of Abraham, we find the consistency of the Scripture narrative receiving a remarkable illustration from the method of Divine dealing to which his family is described as subjected. As they begin to grow into a numerous tribe, the danger arises that they may fail, as the servants of God had previously failed, through temptations, arising from association with the surrounding population. Accordingly, at the very time when traces of the approaching danger are observed (as in the thirty-fourth and thirty-seventh chapters of Genesis), the plan of seclusion, previously resorted to for the preservation of the people of God from contamination, is again applied. It is in this instance secured by a series of events of a more ordinary historic type, but scarcely less remarkable as a scriptural machinery, than the Deluge and the Confusion of Tongues. The family is removed into another nation, where it is kept apart in a separate province. After a lapse of time sufficient for their development into a large body, they are brought out from that

country. They are then passed into a desert where they are alone with God. The events are arranged so as to stamp upon the national mind ideas which it never afterwards loses, though it frequently fails to act up to them, viz. that God protects and blesses the obedient and faithful, and that He regards the disobedient and faithless as opponents. Thus, the lessons of the Fall and Deluge, the Dispersion, the Cities of the Plain, belonging respectively to the three first dispensations, are renewed at the commencement of the national career of the Israelites. They have then their duties to man and to God specially proclaimed in a revelation of law and religion. They receive also a strong ritual, which is filled in type with the germs of coming truth, one which after-experience proved to be an excellent rallying-point for the beginnings of piety, and which would of itself gradually unfold into better things. After being led about, trained, and instructed, they are taken back once more into Canaan to occupy the land: they are helped wonderfully, as is consistent, since

## 142    Lectures on Early Scripture.

the work in progress is for the whole race of man. The essential rule is given them, 'Let the nation dwell alone:' no alliance or compromise with the Hamite race is permitted—in other words no contact with sin and rebellion, for in such contact it is ever the good which falls to the level of the worse. And, as time advances, we find that whenever the rule of separation is kept, their religion thrives; in proportion as the rule is broken religion declines. The nation by degrees expands to its largest growth. It throws off the heretical element by means of the northern kingdom, which is gradually separated and fused in among the surrounding states. Judah is passed through the fire of trial again: a select band—the chosen of the race, exercised in the great principles of faith and obedience—returns from Babylon purified from idolatry: the leading ideas of the true creed are by degrees spread around among the nations. The tabernacle and temple, the psalmist and prophet, have done their work. Within its national enclosure the vine of truth has grown up: a complete system of religious

agency has been arranged. The nations of the world are now to receive the blessing which has been so long preparing for them, and which was foretold to Abraham. The fullness of time is come. Revelation is ready—the Gentiles are ready. The scaffolding of nationalism is taken down, and the great fulfilment of promise is shown in the Saviour. The truth from this time becomes aggressive. It conquers far and wide. It permeates society and tames it. It moulds man to itself. Christ rides on conquering and to conquer. The nations which separated at Babel are to find again their true unity. It could not be otherwise; for what has happened? God has united himself to humanity. The body of man has entered into heaven, taken by Christ: and the Spirit of God has descended to earth, and dwells in the believer.

We find thus in Scripture one unchanging plan taking its commencement from the very earliest period, and undeviatingly pursued through all the Divine dealings with our race. It is not expressly declared, nor is it

always apparent on the surface. But it is the more valuable for evidential purposes on that account. And it is deeply interesting to the attentive and reverent student of Scripture to discover beneath the surface this steady current always setting in the same direction—to find that the more closely he considers the text, and the deeper he penetrates into the meaning of the narrative, the more after the very first commencement every advancing step taken in the Scriptures leads on, by a natural and, indeed, by an unavoidable sequence, towards the one great central consummation which is at last arrived at in Christ.

As the subject is viewed from this point, the Hebrew nation, redeemed from its apparent isolation, is found to be an agency intimately connected with ourselves. We are enabled to admit fully the privileges of the chosen race. We could not, indeed, quarrel with them, for they are in fact our own. Religion, we now observe, does not in any special sense belong to the Jews—the Jews belong to religion. For



the sake of all nations they were set apart; to them were committed the oracles of God for the use of all; the wonders of their history are for the sake of all. The object from the first has been a blessing to all nations. The Jew is the light-bearer for the world; his history is a world-history.

Let this torch, then, be lighted, let its faint flickering be carefully sheltered by the Divine hand, let it be trimmed and brightened, or let it be lessened in its shining and its sparks scattered forth into the darkness, let what will happen to it as God holds it up in his hand—deal with it as he may, it is a light for all men, not for a nation only. The consequences of this are important; the wonderful narrative we now feel ought to be wonderful, for it is not a little country shaping its traditions: it is a Divine hand which is laying there the foundations for the spiritual history of the world. The world has accordingly taken possession of it; its promises belong to the believer; his title dates back antecedent to Judaism; he

146    Lectures on Early Scripture.

claims them as being himself a true child of Abraham, as a child of Noah, as a fellow-worshipper with Enoch and Abel, and as a servant of Christ.

## XIV.

IN approaching the history of Abraham, we are at once struck with the method of its relation, contrasting strongly, as it does, with the preceding parts of Scripture, in which the history of individuals is recorded. Instead of the extreme condensation of other most important biographies, we find here the life of Abraham dwelt on with the minutest detail, and events in it preserved as part of the Divine revelation to Man which are of a private and personal character.

We must remember, however, that the great personages of older times, Seth, Enoch, Abel, and even Noah and Adam, though parts of the historic chain, are not parts of it so immediately connected with ourselves. For us they represent respectively special facts connected with the foundations of

religion; whereas Abraham belongs to us as the more direct commencement of the religious dispensation under which we ourselves live. There are, accordingly, obvious reasons both for those who should be his historical descendants, and for us, who are his spiritual offspring, that full materials should be provided concerning our common ancestor. In their case, individual piety and morality, patriotic sentiment and public worship, would be materially assisted by such information; while for us it was also essential that, when Judaism should be removed, we might have these details of our spiritual ancestry to fall back on. Without these latter chapters of Genesis before the mind, there are important parts of the New Testament which could not have been understood by us; indeed, we may say, which could not have been written. As, therefore, one passes along these details of patriarchal life, if he be inclined to consider any part of them as trivial, let him suspend that judgment until he has traced Scripture further on, and he will find at last that they

suddenly assume, in some remote and unexpected part of the subsequent narrative, their full value and meaning. Let him remember that he has before him the oldest biographies in existence; and that in these accounts of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, and his brethren, we read for the first time the lives of individual men set out, as is believed, under the express inspiration of God himself. The incidents, therefore, selected for transmission, the trains of consequence deduced from them, the approval and rebuke expressed or implied, are all instinct with peculiar significance and importance; and if it be found, as we apprehend it will be in a very abundant degree, that these inferences and conclusions gain confirmation from a comparison with later parts of Scripture, and with the experiences of life, then these early biographies, so simple in form, become an important auxiliary testimony to the system which they introduce.

But if from the merely historical aspects of patriarchal history we ascend to the spiritual, we find ourselves in possession of still more

## 150    Lectures on Early Scripture.

valuable results. We learn the way in which God deals with men—how he encourages and how He rewards—how He rebukes and how He chastens; how He hears prayer, leads His people, protects them, overrules prosperity and trial for them. We have the shadows of His presence, prophecies of the future of His Church; the workings of His Holy Spirit, and the sufferings of His Christ. For purposes, also, of general instruction, this part of Scripture may be looked on as a treasury of knowledge. The foundations of communities are laid open before us, with the secret springs of their amity and repulsion. The old system of life is portrayed, and the social circumstances which led to the Laws of Sinai, and which made them expedient and necessary, are set out.

In approaching a history which gives evidence of being thus framed, it is clear that one should carefully abstain from endeavouring to mould it into accordance with preconceived notions. The object should be to be led by it, instead of attempting to lead it.

One should seek to be taught both by its statements and by its silence—by what it brings out into the light, and by what it keeps back in the shade; by its facts, and also by the arrangement of them; for, surely, in all such points some meaning must be intended to be conveyed.

The account commences with that word of promise which at once defines the object of the whole, and which has been called by Luther 'that right promise which ought to be written in golden letters and proclaimed in all lands, and for which we ought to praise and glorify,' and which is comprised in the words, 'in thee shall all nations of the earth be blessed.' It appears to divide itself into distinct portions, connected as history, but separate and complete in themselves as spiritual acts, and which form successive phases of the inner life. Thus, one of these phases would seem to commence with the first call and promise from God. Obedience to the call is the answer on the part of man; upon that obedience the promise is renewed and con-

firmed, while the whole closes with the offering of sacrifice, which is found perpetually recurring as a climax. Such an arrangement furnishes a complete spiritual cycle. It is not only a step forward in the history—it is not merely charged with prophecy—but it is also the first advance in the Divine walk: a separate part of the work of God in the individual soul. And it is worthy of observation, as a note of the consistency with which Scripture ever keeps in view its original design, that here, as elsewhere, all its other meanings—historical, dispensational, prophetic, or typical—are considered as conducive to this one great object for which God—Father, Son, and Spirit—ever works the final welfare of individual souls.

The course by which the believer is prepared is still the same as that foreshadowed in the career of this great believer. There occurs in a life a crisis at which there is placed before him by God some duty which he cannot perform without a struggle with inclination and interest. There is, at the same



time, a prospect held out and a promise given, which are intended to lead him on, and to strengthen him to make the effort. If he rouse himself, if he throw off the world, and put on Christ at this point, he enters into a new place, the position of his life is changed ; he finds himself nearer to God ; more light from that time beams upon him ; more blessings are vouchsafed, greater confidence is gained, more reality is given to spiritual things, and he understands more of Christ. He is enabled to cling closer to Him, and to accept his sacrifice as the end of his faith, as the central reality of religion, and as the seal of our pardon and title to heaven.

Let it be observed here, for we must never cease to cling to that rock, how important is the fact that now again for the third time at the beginning of a new dispensation, we find placed before us the idea of sacrifice. As with Abel and with Noah, so with Abraham, sacrifice is ever first ; the rite given, as we believe, from God, full, as we believe, of the great mystery of Christ's death for man, is by

each new era of religion successively presented as its introductory act. It has been considered not improbable that one of the reasons of the Almighty for calling Abraham to a life of such continual and painful travel, was that he might witness everywhere to this doctrine of sacrifice. If we trace his journeyings we shall find that in the course of them he had visited the principal nations of that time; so that he was in fact the first Christian missionary preaching the Gospel as far as then known, and living the Gospel in the sight of the world, as he offered those sacrifices appointed to keep in the mind of the spiritual worshipper a perpetual reference to the 'Lamb slain from the foundation of the world.'\*

But while God has first placed in his revelation the portrait of Abraham, in this holy strength of his faith and obedience, to be a comfort and encouragement to the sons of Abraham in all ages of His church, there may also be not a little benefit for them in the portrait of Abraham which immediately

\* Rev. H. Blount's Lecture.

follows. For as we have seen him in the strength which is of God, he is now to be shown in the weakness which is his own. Leaving the place of sacrifice and of Divine answer and presence, passing on through the land of which the Lord had said, '*This is the land which I will give,*' he journeyed in his journeyings towards the south. A famine arising, he is found going down into Egypt, the land where the fear of God was not before men's eyes. Thus, he who before left even his own kindred, who were ungodly, trusting his keeping to God, who would show him a land of promise, now leaves that land to go among strangers, though ungodly. What is the cause of this great change? The weak and tempted child of Abraham may take courage as he sees that the father whose faith he imitates is only strong so long as God keeps him so. The man of God, steadfast and established, should learn from the example of Abraham to walk with meekness and carefulness, confiding solely in the power which is of God. For after the love of the world is

ended, and the pride of life is humbled, and the desires of the flesh are quenched, there is yet one more enemy which may never come, but which may come suddenly. It came to Job—it comes to Abraham. The last enemy of the body is death—the last trial of the soul is fear of death. Let not faith say, ‘My feet are so strongly set, I shall never be moved.’ There is a public example placed before the church for all. Abraham through fear changed from a man of faith into a man of policy. He no longer is the same who could feel ‘I follow wherever God leads me; I will bear whatever God does with me.’ He is now full of scheming and device. He goes down into Egypt; in doing so he may have thought to save his family; but as a result there comes risk to himself, and to escape that he must needs deny his wife; and that this fraud may be successful she too must become a partner in it. And thus the God of Abraham is to be offended that Abraham may be kept from harm. How much trouble, and to what little purpose!

His wife is, after all, taken from him. She who shall become a 'mother of nations' is detained a captive in Pharaoh's house, and for her release a revelation of the Lord will have to make manifest that which His servant has concealed.

## XV.

As Abraham left the rich valleys of Egypt, and went his way back to the land of his promise—his camels laden with the precious gifts of Pharaoh, his flocks and herds in long lines around, his hundreds of armed servants guarding the passage of the women and children, and of his rescued wife—there can hardly have been forgotten by the humbled patriarch that recent interview, when, called before the king, he had bowed beneath the just rebuke, ‘What is this that thou hast done unto me? why didst thou not tell me that she was thy wife? why saidst thou, She is my sister?’\* As his eye now passed along the file of the caravan which threaded the solitudes of the desert, he must have been conscious that some of that great riches ‘in

\* Gen. xii. 18.

cattle and silver and gold' belonged to him because Pharaoh, whom he had deceived, had 'entreated him well for the woman's sake.' When, at last, his resting-point was come to, and they paused and settled down, and fixed their tents and folded their flocks among the hills of Bethel, almost within their sight would be the spots where, in after days, Achan hid his wedge of gold, and Samuel asked of another doubtfully-enriched man, 'What meaneth this bleating of the sheep in mine ears, and the lowing of the oxen which I hear?'

As to typical proportions for the Church, we may see a true meaning in that wealth which has been given to the patriarch; but for himself, morally and as a man, we must fear there will lurk a difficulty within it. Let us pass on, and note the result. Abraham has built his altar, offered the sacrifice, called upon the name of the Lord. Let it be supposed—and it is by no means an unreasonable supposition—that his worship has

\* 1 Sam. xv. 14.

been fruitful, that his soul is again filled with the consciousness of where his true strength lies, that he is restored from his fear and his weakness. At this appropriate juncture it is that a new point in his career is brought out before the Church. It commences thus: By the side of the patriarch's life, another life had been leading; when he in strength came forth from his father's house, another man had come with him; when he in weakness went down into Egypt, another man had gone with him; when he returned from it enriched, together with his train another long retinue of men with their possessions had journeyed side by side. This was the following of Lot; 'and Lot also, which went with Abraham, had flocks and herds, and tents;'<sup>\*</sup> and Lot was Abraham's follower, as<sup>\*</sup> Abraham was God's.

The narrative has already presented to us the man of faith as called on to make surrender of himself and his future into the care and guidance of his God. It has also

<sup>\*</sup> Gen. xiii. 5.



shown the man of God as under the exercise of fear in the season of distress. It will now bring forth his soul into the greater trials which attend prosperity—trials of our own nation, age, and personal estate; and which are found to pierce in between man and man, dividing believers from professors, and the truly faithful from the mixed multitude which follows in Christ's camp.

The two men have grown so rich, and therefore so many interests have sprung up around each—so many partisans protect the interests of each—so many jealousies are ready among the partisans of each—that risk of strife has come. From two friendly men they have grown into two rival powers, and their wealth, according to a constant tendency, has led them, though of one blood and one faith, one past and one prospect, to the border of conflict—and conflict, too, in the presence of their common foe. 'There was a strife between the herdmen of Abraham's cattle and the herdmen of Lot's cattle; and the Canaanite and the Perizzite dwelled then

in the land.' One virtue alone can stop such breach of brotherhood. Those persons in all ages of whom it could with truth be said that they were spiritually the children of Abraham have always practised it. Abraham's great antitype, the Lord Jesus Christ, solemnly enjoined it. It is the one thing which shows the Holy Spirit present in the heart. It is the one pacific victorious virtue—the power of self-surrender. It will be interesting, therefore, to observe how accurately this first outline of the life of faith is drawn, so that the graces which are found developing themselves in the subsequent narrative are to be found also in the early model of the Christian man; and the type being fixed from the first, the scale of graces which lead up to Christ is in harmony with that character which is both found in Him, and descends from Him to the present age.

There is not any reason for supposing that the blame of this strife attached to Abraham more than to his kinsman Lot. If, for peace' sake, they were to live apart, it was to Abra-

ham that the choice of pasture and of dwelling would of right belong, for he was first in rank, both in the family and in the Church;\* but he that loves peace most is the one to suggest how peace may be secured, and he it is who is ready to make the sacrifice necessary to secure it. It is the more advanced in godliness who is the first to remember, 'We are brethren.' He it is also who first discovers that in brotherhood this meaning is contained, 'I am ready to give myself up for your, my brother's, sake;' 'Let there be no strife, I pray thee, between thee and me, and between thine and mine, for we are brethren. Is not the whole land before thee? Separate thyself, I pray thee, from me: if thou wilt take the left hand, then I will go to the right; or if thou depart to the right hand, then I will go to the left.'†

As Abraham spake and looked around, he in his holiness only regarded one thing—the prospect of peace. But the man to whom

\* Chrysost. Hom. xxxv.

† Gen. xiii. 9.

the words were spoken, as *he* looked round before answering, observed something very different. 'Lot lifted up his eyes, and beheld all the plain of Jordan, that it was well watered everywhere before the Lord destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah, even as the garden of the Lord, like the land of Egypt, as thou comest unto Zoar. Then Lot chose him all the plain of Jordan, and dwelled in the cities of the plain, and pitched his tent towards Sodom. But the men of Sodom were wicked, and sinners before the Lord exceedingly.' The temptation of prosperity had defeated Lot; the world had now become too large a thing for his weaker faith to resign. He chose a land of fatness for his flocks, of leanness for his soul. He would go forth. When his tents had been struck, and the last of his followers had disappeared in the distance, what would be the condition of Abraham? His conduct had led to this result. His numbers had been lessened by perhaps half, and the fairest portions of the land were lost to him. Such are the surrenders of faith, and its apparent

losses. Now was the time, therefore, at which faith should be assured that they are not really losses. Now it was that the Lord appeared to him, and, as to land which he had surrendered, said, 'Lift up now thine eyes, and look from the place where thou art, northward, and southward, and eastward, and westward: for all the land which thou seest, to thee will I give it, and to thy seed for ever.'\* Already, then, was the fair portion which Lot had gone forth to possess conveyed to another before his first entry on that well-watered plain. As to numbers, in which Abraham was diminished, the promise of the Lord was, 'And I will make thy seed as the dust of the earth: so that if a man can number the dust of the earth, then shall thy seed also be numbered.'† The man of God arises and walks through the land; he removes his tent to Mamre, which is Hebron; and once more the cycle closes with the solemn act—'He built there an altar to the Lord.'

\* Gen. xiii. 14.

† Gen. xiii. 16.

Much of our time is occupied in trying to approach God. It is our highest occupation. But it is sometimes for years attended with very little success. The reason generally is, that our conduct in our lives defeats our prayers. Personal schemes, vain fancies, narrow sympathies, efforts to draw all we can of possessions and opinions into the vortex of our own wilful usurping self, bar the door of the heart against God; and however we may cry with the voice, 'Enter!' we prevent Him from coming in. Observe how in Abraham the soul by resignation obtains possession. How it realises the seeming paradox of later and fuller promise, and by losing all gains all; and how subduing self, which is the soul's idolatry, it finds God at once approaching to reveal Himself. The same will still be found true, and those who make the Gospel surrender to Christ, for peace' sake and truth's sake denying this world, will in proportion to their effort receive a just and admeasured recompense.

We may understand here, also, how, in the

mystery of Providence, by the side of one man's life, other lives are planted which twine around it, grow with it, strengthen with it, or fade and fall with it. We may understand also, how, after it has fallen and lain in the dust, its more robust frame may rise and put forth blossom and bear fruit again; and yet that those other weaker souls may never shake off the dust which chokes their life. Those who are in positions of strength should never forget this indirect responsibility. While they are strong, others around may be helped to stand; when they fall, others will surely fall with them. The first plea of the first criminal was an effort to shake off this responsibility—'Am I my brother's keeper?'—while the completest development of Christian ethics consists in its full recognition.

The children of Abraham have here a lesson to learn in their father's history. His fall was Lot's snare: Lot's snare became next his trial. Lot's entanglement in the snare grew more and more complete; no effort of Abraham in act or intercession could bring

him back; and long after these actors who first set in motion the train of events had been removed, the consequences which we trace from Abraham's deceit in Egypt again overtook his descendants, who met with severe trials from the Moabite offspring of Lot's sin, while these last themselves at length fell back into the doom of their ancestors, according to the declaration of the voice of the Lord in Zephaniah: 'I have heard the reproach of Moab and the revilings of the children of Ammon, whereby they have reproached my people and magnified themselves against their border. Therefore, as I live, saith the Lord of Hosts, the God of Israel, Surely Moab shall be as *Sodom*, and the children of Ammon as Gomorrah, even the breeding of nettles, and saltpits, and a perpetual desolation.'

The next period opens by showing us Lot, the servant of God, who, having ventured for the sake of profit into the circle of the worldly, is involved in the risks of worldliness. The

\* Chap. ii. 8, 9.



detail of the first war on record is before us. The system which began at Shinar by rebellion has extended itself, as we surmised would be the case, by tyranny, and the cities where Lot dwells are among its vassals. As the unhappy man is carried off with his goods into bondage, he illustrates the great problem of religion, sin working out its own punishment. Abraham comes to his rescue. Observe, therefore, that his readiness for separation was not from want of love, and his readiness to give way was not from want of spirit. He is now as bold as he was then meek, and though he will not let his shepherds strive for his own interests, he produces three hundred trained men to fight for his kinsman's benefit. He pursued and smote, and 'brought back all the goods, and his brother Lot and his goods, and the women also, and the people.'

The same loving peaceful heart which had said, I will have no strife with my brother, had said, I will endure strife for the sake of my brother. It had been ready before to bear the severance of dear ties and the loss of

170    Lectures on Early Scripture.

benefits which should have been its own for the sake of others; now it endures hardship and danger for the same cause. Before this, when Lot had left him and he had given  
\* up the choice of the land, the conflict of faith had been internal in the soul, where most of the man of God's battles are still fought. Then it was silently, and to the soul itself, that God had given, as He still does, the answering blessing. Now the conflict had been outward before the world; the acknowledgment, therefore, to the man of faith will properly be outward, and will be rendered by the priest of the most High God.

## XVI.

As we approach the next phase in the history of Abraham, let our thoughts be carried back to a point which has already been before us when we were considering the subject of the Tower of Babel and the dispersion of men from the Plain of Shinar. We observed that, at that point of the history, a struggle of principles or dispositions was engaged in; on the one side there was the effort of men to centralise, with a view to personal power; on the other side was the will of God to disperse men for the sake of general happiness. We found the Babel builders laying the first stone of their work in rebellion. We foresaw that power, formed upon such a basis, could only bring men together in the relation of tyrant and slave. Had their plan succeeded, we considered that man's enemy

would have reigned supreme. We believed that its defeat gave peace and holiness their opportunity to establish themselves on earth.

We have now occasion to observe that the view we then took is borne out by facts, for the narrative brings us once more in contact with those powerful men who, though crippled in resources by the dispersion from Babel, still carried forward the same plans they had there opened. The characters now to be introduced on the stage are the great rulers of that time; and Amraphel, King of Shinar, is found among the chiefs of their league. The occupation on which they are engaged is exactly what we should have premised from their past history. They are waging an aggressive war. It is the first public conflict detailed in Scripture. In its character it is a type of many of the conflicts which have since desolated the homes of men. It begins in a desire to spread dominion as far as possible—to draw all things to self, and to rule them for selfish ends. Such

policy we here distinctly trace back to those who began to build Babel, that they might avoid going forth as God commanded; and if we can trace it back further still, where are we to look for the root from which Babel springs? We find it in the one family which came forth from the ark; in that member of it—Ham—who rejected and despised the parent and the representative of God. Let us then receive as among the most important duties of private life, reverence and obedience to father and mother—to husband, to master, and mistress—to all who bear authority and who are entitled to be obeyed. One may have reasons to offer against this duty, for the constant opportunities of close criticism, which the confidence of private life supplies, may give to a too quick-sighted judgment occasions to observe weakness, inconsistency, and imperfection in those set over us. Yet, let this be remembered, it was Ham alone who would allow himself to see the weakness of the first parent of our new world. His brothers hid their eyes and con-

cealed from themselves that which a son ought not to behold.

For those who stand by and who may be benefited by the sight of conduct which is according to the will of God, there are few things more interesting, more lovely, than to see this voluntary submission where God has given it as a duty to submit. The work is difficult at times, but it has high rewards. It is preparation for a proper exercise of authority, when God's time comes for us to exercise it. It has the promise of blessing. It brings peace and present plenty in the soul. Those, on the other hand, who are self-willed under subjection, are full of restless misery at the time—and what can they expect to be when themselves in command? They may produce some outer results by their energy, but they must almost inevitably fail to secure that true end of government, the happiness of the governed; for they start from the very opposite idea, that of benefiting and pleasing self.

Let us understand then that these things

are inscribed for our sakes among the monuments of the very earliest society, and in the annals of the first household; and let us hold to them as lessons given from God, and which are as distinctly written in these living episodes as they were clearly engraved on the stones at Sinai—pressed upon man here at the first foundation of the holy commonwealth, by intention of the same Divine patron of our race, who afterwards Himself so beautifully taught and illustrated them along the busy shores and among the quiet villages of Galilee.

We find all past history disturbed by the recurrence of the one perpetual misery of strife — projecting outwardly the fever and unrest of the revolted soul within. At this early epoch we may already decipher its meaning. Beneath the glitter and grand array which kindles the animal spirit—beneath the stirring traditions of gallantry and glory there is often a dark secret concealed. We must strip off that tinsel, and we shall find within lying hid much which is mean

and ignoble in the heart of fallen man; ungenerous preference of self and cruel intolerance of others, chaining down and dragging away; buying preeminence with the currency of blood and tears and bondage. Nor may we stop short at this foreign spectacle; war in the family is as real in its strife, as hateful in its nature, as ruinous in its influence against happiness, as the more public conflict. Whether the battle be fought with the sword or with the tongue, round the hearth or on the plain, the combat is still the same—one Nimrod ever wages it, and one Mediator alone can ever stop it: He who from his leadership in the subjugation of the revolted passions is emphatically styled the Prince of Peace.

But, it may be asked, Is it then the teaching of Scripture that the Christian is never to give consent to war? As much has been understood by some, but surely with erroneous judgment. There is a time at which Christ says, 'Put up thy sword into thy sheath;' there is a time at which he says,



‘Let him that hath no sword buy one.’ There is a time at which Abraham says, ‘Let there be no strife, I pray thee, between me and thee;’ and a time at which he arms his trained servants, and smites, and pursues: you will see him now as ripe for a righteous quarrel as he was then eager for a loving truce; and note, that though by choice a man of peace, he was not on that account the less ready with trained men for war. His conduct in all this assures us, we repeat, that when before he so readily parted with Lot, it was not from lack of love; and that when he bore with patience, it was not from lack of spirit; indeed, it shows him a true warrior—first of all winning victories over self—and it also is an evidence, were it needed, that there are causes of quarrel which may call for the interference of the man of peace.

The king of Shinar has defeated the king of Sodom. The city has been spoiled; Lot and his family have been carried away to slavery; Abraham has gone out in pursuit, has fought, and rescued them. From this time he has

178    Lectures on Early Scripture.

taken up an historical position and become one of the great powers of those parts. As he returns victorious, the man of God is welcomed by the rulers of the land. The temptations of the successful now await him.

First our attention is claimed by the interview with Melchizedek king of Salem. Had the account of the meeting stood alone, it would still have been highly remarkable; but the incident is not left in isolation; the thoughts of the Jewish Church were directed to it in a special way. After nearly a thousand years from the occurrence, the inspired Psalmist suddenly breaks forth with words which turn attention back again to this early event,\* and after another thousand years, once more an inspired writer is found using it as the machinery of high revelations.†

Who, then, is this Melchizedek, whose appearance is so sudden, who is lost again for so long a period from the narrative, and who at last is once more referred to in the grandest association? The words spoken of

\* Ps. cx.

† Heb. vii.

him are few, but important: 'Melchizedek king of Salem brought forth bread and wine, and he was the priest of the Most High God, and he blessed him and said, Blessed be Abraham of the Most High God, possessor of heaven and earth, and blessed be the Most High God which hath delivered thine enemies into thy hand. And he (Abraham) gave him tithes of all.'\* Who is this king and priest? What does his presence here signify for the people of God? 'The Lord hath sworn,' declares His Psalmist, 'and will not repent, that his Christ shall be a priest for ever after the order of Melchizedek.' What is this high priesthood? The Lord's oath has surely introduced a great occasion, and demands the reverent thought of his people.

Some have supposed Melchizedek to be Christ in one of his preappearances; but the very words of comparison seem to preclude this supposition. Christ is not Melchizedek, but *like* Melchizedek. Others have supposed that he was Shem, the son of the great

\* Gen. xiv. 18.

patriarch Noah. This would identify him with the founder of the family of which Abraham was a member. It would therefore be extremely interesting if we could be assured of it, but there is no authority or ground for it to be gained from the Scripture itself; and, could it be proved, it would, though interesting, weaken the force of this passage by depriving it of the inferences which will be found to flow from it as it at present stands. After taking together all we collect from Scripture of Melchizedek, the following appears to be the just view of the passage:—

At the time when Abraham was in Palestine, a great change was gradually passing over the religious condition of the world. The various communities of men scattered far and wide may have each taken with it at first from the common centre the light of revealed truths, to keep alive in the heart of future generations the altar of the true faith; but by degrees this light had dimmed. They lived more and more by the world of sense, and less by the power of faith. God was dis-

appearing from their knowledge; idols were grouping into a pantheon; a reprobate mind was growing. We find traces of this in the narrative. The iniquity of the Amorites, though not yet full, was already great. Among the smiling valleys of Palestine were planted whole communities which were 'sinners before the Lord exceedingly.' The call of Abraham was evidently not a day too soon; another ark, of another sort, was already wanted, and was preparing. The faith was to be shut up within the framework of a strict nationalism, an exclusive religious community, and rigid ritual observance, until the floods of idolatry should have abated, and it could again set its hallowed altar on the earth. The corrupt world was now to be disfranchised from its power to worship. The simple rites of Noah's epoch, full of divinest meaning and a sweet savour to God—the first world-wide priesthood, in which the head of the family and of the tribe was the offerer, chief in religion as in rule, and so revered in both, was to be put down; a close system

was to take its place; men of one tribe, of a certain parentage, were alone authorised for specific duties, and were to discharge their functions only during a certain part of their life; the whole system was to be straitened and confined; to become provincial. For the one nation alone the altars were to burn.

The temper of the age rendered necessary such a restriction. At the same time, however, the interests of the religious future required it to be understood that the new method was only temporary and for a purpose, that it did not embrace the fulness of God's counsel of mercy, and that the Levitical order was not the completion of priesthood; for of such an order Christ could not be. His priesthood is universal in its efficacy—a propitiation for the sins of the whole world. Upon His breastplate are the names of all peoples. Rival distinctions of nations are in Him abolished; all learn again the one language, group themselves round the one central altar, and become restored to the one whole family of heaven and earth, in an everlasting life.

Israel could not represent the fulness of this extension. Melchizedek, one of the last priests of the ancient order, must be the type. He is royal as well as priestly—King of Righteousness is implied by his title—Peace is the name of the city where he rules; bread and wine are the symbolic offerings he bears; and as he is brought into contact with Abraham to convey the Divine blessing to the man of faith, and stamp his works with Divine approval, his presence proves it to have been understood and admitted, at the very beginning of Judaism, that he and his system were greater than all those who (as Levi) might thereafter claim priesthood under Abraham.\*

Should we, then, find anyone pointing out that the Jewish system is partial, incomplete, and in a certain degree unworthy of the universality of God's character and man's wants, we cannot consider this a difficulty, for we find that it is professedly and intentionally so. Its arrangements, laws, types, worship,

\* R. W. Hamilton.

## 184    Lectures on Early Scripture.

all that it has, are the contraction of a freer system, and at the same time the preparation for one still higher and more free. The fountains of truth had sent forth their waters in many streams, which wasted and died out in the thirsty desert. One of these is secured within a channel; it flows more steadily; it widens, deepens; lofty rocks fence in its course; beneath this restraint, it grows into a river; when at last it issues forth, its volume is vast, and, by steady and unchecked current, it will at last unite itself to the ocean of Truth. Such has been the course of religion through the world; and at Melchizedek we are about to part from the ancient faith to enter the barriers of the Jewish system, which will presently begin in Circumcision.



## XVII.

WE now approach the particular point at which the dispensation of Abraham may be considered as more fully commencing. The epochs of Adam and of Noah have been made known to us only in outline. They are traced sufficiently in their general idea to enable us to catch sight of the great counter-workings of Nature and of Grace, and to observe how the struggle has ever been one in its essential conditions—how there has ever been, for man, one temptation and one safeguard—and how, while societies and individuals have moved, the disposition of their movements has still been either in accordance with the will of Christ or of Satan. But into details of those early times only small insight has been given. Three or four events alone stand prominently out between Adam and

## 186    Lectures on Early Scripture.

Abraham, and each of them represents some important crisis. All the rest is concealed from our observation. We now, however, arrive at the threshold of a period which is more fully laid open to our scrutiny. The covenant with Abraham is about to be ratified, and that cycle to begin which will progressively advance until it completes itself in the manifestation of the Lord. What has gone before may be regarded as introductory—it is at this point that the full flow of the history is first found.

It is deeply important to mark the very significant fact which, as a key-stone, binds together the new system. At the beginning of the fifteenth chapter of Genesis, we find Abraham in the position of one who has made sacrifices for the sake of conscience, and who, while he has incurred danger has refused all compensation, lest it should be said by the enemies of God that they had contributed to the prosperity of His servant. Though recently victorious, he has now also acquired the anxious conviction that he is within reach of powerful

foes, and that the incursion which has just been defeated may at any time be renewed. It is at this juncture that the word of the Lord comes to him in a vision, with the assurance so appropriate to his cares:—‘Fear not, Abram: I am thy shield, and thy exceeding great reward.’

At the word ‘reward,’ the question of the long-desired heir rises to the patriarch’s lips, and the answer is, ‘Lord God, what wilt Thou give me, seeing I go childless? To me Thou has given no seed, and one born in my house (my steward) is mine heir.’ The Divine assurance in reply is, that not this one, but his own son, shall be his heir. And then ‘He brought him forth abroad, and said, Look now toward heaven, and tell the stars, if thou be able to number them: and He said unto him, So shall thy seed be.’ Then come the important words which have been so much regarded in theology:—‘And he believed in the Lord, and He counted it to him for righteousness.’ \*

\* Gen. xv. 6.

Now, that we may estimate the nature of this faith, and that we may understand what it was that Abraham believed, let us endeavour to realise what was his spiritual position at the time.

We have considered the first great promise (the seed of the woman shall bruise the serpent's head) as having been, in fact, the beginning of the Christian religion. We have found it only reasonable to suppose that the nature of the enmity which the serpent represented, and of the deliverance from it implied by the term 'bruising the head,' was made known, in some method suitable to their position, to the first professors of religion. A promise which should present no points of application to the circumstances of their case would be so alien to all that we know of Divine dealings, and in itself so incapable of interesting feeling and influencing conduct, that it would be a very gratuitous assumption were we to hold that in receiving their promise they had no sufficient knowledge of its meaning. Any completer insight, such as was in later times

gradually vouchsafed, we have reason to conclude they by no means possessed, but of a sense of the general nature of their misfortune, and of the general nature of the remedy by which it was to be alleviated and cured, it would be unreasonable to suppose them deprived. Communications of an intimate nature were still taking place between earth and heaven ; the sacrificial fires were already sending up a sweet savour ; it would be unjust, therefore, to infer that, while these opportunities were afforded, they were so partially used, that a religion which was instinct with such high meanings had those meanings completely concealed, and thus became comparatively inoperative on the affections and conduct of its professors. We consider, therefore, that this primeval promise, given at the period of man's fall, which is the germ of the religion of man's restoration, was, at any rate, so far understood as to make the acceptance of it a test of the allegiance of the heart to the Divine appointments. That acceptance would be continually represented by the

performance of sacrifice; and the substance of promise handed on from generation to generation, would, in this rite duly performed, be recognised and appropriated.

After the Flood, all the accumulated treasure of Divine knowledge, hope and faith, which had been gathered up into the one family, would be again spread from its new centre, and again become the cherished property of believers. Christ, in his great work and relationship, would, in some sort, however dimly, have been believed in and hoped for by them, as the remedy for the evils of man's fallen lot, as the destroyer of man's enemy, and as the restorer of pristine bliss; and their clinging to these truths would still be expressed by their adherence to the primeval rite of sacrifice. True it may be that, as men were scattered abroad, these ideas gradually faded and became mixed with other notions of human suggestion, so that the religions of the nations grew at last to be a travesty of the Divine system, though still perhaps, in a more or less appreciable form,

bearing the features of their old parentage ; it is, however, on record that, at the time of the call of Abraham, a true priesthood, as that of Melchizedek, was yet possible, and that thus there were lights burning from which the lamp of faith might be fed—that in the pious minds of believers, such as Abraham and his house, the hope of the promised salvation still survived, and the sacrifice which set forth that hope still continued to be offered.

We must further consider that, for the particular family of Abraham, this promise had already gained a profound import and special significance, dating back to the time of the first revelation described as having been made to its chief, when it was said to him, ‘ I will make of thee a great nation, and thou shalt be a blessing, and in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed.’

We have believed it evident, from the very form of this promise, that the motive which sent him forth on his life-long pilgrimage was not the mere prospect that he, a

childless man, should have an heir; but that, having an heir, he should become a blessing, and that the blessing should extend, not merely to the great nation about to spring from him, but to all nations of the earth. Connect this with the idea which was constantly uppermost in the minds of the faithful of these times. Remember that those words were spoken to one who longed for the time when the seed of the woman should put down man's enemy and become man's restorer—to one who, in the midst of a fading religion, still clung to this great truth, and knew how to express it, and plead it in the old appointed way of sacrifice; and then consider what meaning they must have conveyed, and been intended to convey, to him. Surely the conviction which made the aged Abraham a pilgrim to a strange land must have been this—that in him the promise should be realised; that his children yet unborn should be the beginning of this special blessing; that he should be founder of the line from which the bruiser of the serpent's head should come;



and that in him the world should thus receive back the lost heritage.

Dear to primeval piety, in a degree inconceivable in our time, may have been the thought, 'through me shall come a re-entrance into Paradise, the restoration of God's presence, the cessation of our sins and sorrows;' for then the lovely traditions of the earliest life might still have been heard from the lips of Shem; and then, also, the terrors of the Flood were within living experience.

Now, if Abraham, having thus understood the promise had this hope that in him should be the beginning of the restoration, then, as time passed on, without the birth of the expected child, a settled disappointment must have by degrees taken possession of him. Nothing given in substitution could compensate for this which was withheld. His conduct in the past had shown that he valued wealth but little, and would on a fit occasion risk his personal safety. It would, therefore, be no full satisfaction to him to hear that God would insure his reward, if by that reward

were merely meant his temporal prosperity ; nor would it be a complete comfort to hear that God would be his shield, if by that promise were merely meant his temporal security, so long as the very beginnings of that which he regarded as his true object were withheld, and he remained a childless man. When, therefore, as at the beginning of the fifteenth chapter of Genesis, those assurances of safety and reward are made to him, his reply points at once to this feeling—‘What avails all, so long as I am childless?’ And then once more, in answer to this long-tried faith, which will not be content with anything less than faith’s great fulfilment, the promise is solemnly made of an offspring as innumerable as the stars of heaven. Twenty years of fruitless expectation had passed since that promise had been first made—twenty years during which its accomplishment might naturally have taken place ; but now the prospect was far less hopeful, since both the patriarch and his wife were approaching an advanced age. The great work, then, which his piety achieved at

the crisis of his life when God thus appeared to him was this—once more there was presented to his soul its promised object, the Messiah in the distance. Once more there rose before him the prospect of the coming Deliverer; the precious hope of being the channel of the great blessing again sprung in his heart—the character of Him who promised again gave value to the pledge. His heart coupled these two together—the Saviour who should supply man's need, the long-tried, faithful God who had offered to give Him. With this glorious hope before its gaze, his faith was able to overlook the disappointment of the past, and the impediments of nature. It counted that which was impossible as certain—disbelieved ordinary probability—against hope believed in hope,\* believed in God, who was testing its depth of reliance. Thus Abraham, by the fullest operation of man's most unselfish capacity, and trusting altogether in God, laid hold on the promise. The power of faith supported him. He believed

\* Rom. iv. 18.

in God, and 'He counted it to him for righteousness.'

In the above view it is considered that an important element of Abraham's faith was not merely his believing, nor his believing that he should have a son, but his believing in the coming and the victory of Messiah over man's enemy.

The value of such faith as a justifying instrument results, in some degree, from its comparatively negative character ; the soul in which it resides being gifted also with those other graces which are ever found in company with a lively faith, and being thus in harmony with the great truths of revelation, and by faith accepting these truths, faith is the submission of the soul to that which is divinely addressed to it. What faith receives is given ; whatever it may figuratively be said to do for the soul is, in fact, done by God. Justification by faith, then, is, in other words, salvation by free grace. 'It is of faith that it might be by grace ;' 'and thus it gives glory to God,'\*

\* Rom. iv. 16, 20.

making the work of our redemption altogether His. It extracts from the actions to which it gives rise the dangerous quality of merit, since whatever he who is gifted with it may do in consequence of his faith must, as in the case of Abraham, 'be entirely attributed to the gracious revelation and most liberal promises made by God out of His own mere mercy. Therefore to all such, as to Abraham, there is no cause for boasting, and no merit;' so that when it is said by St. Paul, 'To him that believeth his faith is counted for righteousness,' it is 'as if he had said, On this very account, because his faith is reckoned to him for righteousness, his justification is entirely gratuitous, since faith, by itself, means Grace and excludes Merit.'\*

It being the quality of faith divinely quickened to lay hold on Gospel truth divinely communicated, we find it here exercised in appropriating such measure of the Gospel plan as was then revealed to Abraham, of whom it was afterwards witnessed, that 'he

\* Bp. Bull, Harmon. Apost. Diss. ii. s. 23.

died in faith, not having received the promises, but *having seen them* afar off, and was persuaded of them, and embraced them, and confessed that he was a stranger and pilgrim on the earth,' and of whom Jesus Christ himself said, 'Your father Abraham rejoiced to see my day, and he saw it, and was glad.'\* This faith God counted unto him for righteousness.

The distinctions between actual and imputed righteousness are in some measure technical. Wherever there is a lively, that is a justifying faith, there are also the dispositions for good works, which, opportunity being given, strengthen in the heart, and show themselves in the conduct. Thus it must be allowed that the thief on the cross had a lively apprehension of Christ as the Saviour which amounted to a justifying faith; otherwise his professions would not have been accepted. But that faith would of necessity have resulted in good works, had opportunity been given; for, unless it had consisted in an apprehension of Christ,

\* Heb. xi. 13; John viii. 56.

which would have led to such subordination to His will, such gratitude, regard and like qualities, as would have produced good works, it would not have been a lively or justifying faith. Wherever, therefore, righteousness is imputed, the germ of works necessarily exists, being necessarily attached to the apprehension of spiritual truths, in which justifying faith consists. On the other hand, good works, however full the righteous life may be of them, can never of themselves justify, since they are laden with imperfections; so that the righteous man who does them must come back for his justification to the faith which produces them. Indeed, as by their definition it is declared that good works have this essential quality of being connected with faith, and as faith without their actual performance is known to justify, it would be in any case uncalled for to set faith aside, and to introduce good works as a substituted or conjoined method of justification. While availing ourselves, therefore, of the distinction between actual and imputed righteousness, we

have to look upon it as only conditional, since, with regard to the judgment of God, all righteousness is to be held as imputed, and with regard to the state of the soul, all righteousness may be considered as actual.

But, as it is not pretended that there was ever any other way whereby men must be saved but through Christ,\* ‘the seed of the woman indicated from the first, and by degrees fully revealed;’ as no man can be saved by the law or sect which he professes, however diligently he may have framed his life according to that law and the light of nature; as the old Fathers did not look only for transitory promises, and as both in the Old and New Testament everlasting life is offered to mankind by Christ,† we should consider that justifying faith is always connected with a vital apprehension or acceptance of Christ, according to the measure of revelation given, and, therefore, always connected with righteousness, either inchoative or actual, as the necessary consequence of such apprehension,

\* Acts iv. 12.

† Art. VII. and XVIII.



but that at the same time this righteousness, always for purposes of justification, recedes, and leaves to faith the work of apprehending the Gospel salvation; in other words, leaves the child of Abraham to receive his salvation by the free gift and grace of Christ.

## XVIII.

ORTHODOX theology, from the time of the Apostles, has invariably considered that a great spiritual crisis is represented by the sixth verse of the fifteenth chapter of Genesis, which formed the subject of the preceding Lecture, and indeed, with the Pauline Epistles before us, a different conclusion would have been inadmissible. The revelation from the Lord to Abraham is still continued after that verse; and, from the subject of a countless race of descendants, it passes to that of the inheritance of the land.

On this being promised by the Lord, Abraham asks, 'Lord God, whereby shall I know that I shall inherit it?' The question has not been considered as indicating, like the question of Zacharias to the angel—'Whereby shall I know this?'—a disbelief of the words

spoken, but as partaking of the character of the question of the Virgin Mary, 'How shall this be?'—of whom it was said, 'Blessed is she that believed'\*—and an answer is accordingly vouchsafed to the Patriarch.

The revelation is made by way of vision, and the animals prepared by Abraham were those which at the subsequent establishment of the Law were accepted as sacrificial. The distinction of certain animals for such purposes is observable even at the exit from the ark. It must therefore have been imported from the original life, and may, in all probability, have dated back to the primeval revelation. The method of arranging the animals on this occasion was also in accordance with what is found to have been the usual custom in the ratification of all important public covenants, and traces of which are left in several languages in the very phrases which express the striking of

\* Luke i. 18, 20, 34, 45 ; Augustine, *De Civitate Dei*, xvi. 24.

the bargain. There follows a revelation by word, containing three parts : one, that Abraham's children shall be strangers in a foreign land, and afflicted; another, that the oppressing nation shall be judged by Him who is giving the revelation, and that Abraham's seed shall afterwards come out with great substance; the future career of his descendants thus bears an analogical resemblance to the Patriarch's own personal adventures in Egypt, which are raised into typical significance. These two first parts are dispensational, and of prior importance, and it is considered that they are repeated in symbol in the seventeenth verse, ' And it came to pass, that when the sun went down and it was dark, behold a smoking furnace and a burning lamp that passed between those pieces '—the furnace representing the trial of affliction; the lamp of fire representing the visitation and presence of the Lord. The third part, which is more lightly traced, refers only to Abraham personally. It separates him from the coming afflictions, promising him a

peaceful end; but it is worthy of remark, how completely the belief in a future state is taken for granted in the term in which this promise is expressed: 'Thou shalt go to thy fathers in peace.'

It will be found that as there is a systematic revelation of the Divine purpose, from the very beginning of Abraham's career, so the original declaration at the Call comprises all that succeeds. It contains the following prospect: 1. Extension; 2. Personal blessing and personal eminence; 3. Being the means of blessing to others; 4. Protection and support; 5. Extension of the third promise to all the nations of the earth—its reduplication giving it prominence as the principal feature of the whole.

Subsequent revelations do not so much extend the original one as bring out the parts of it which circumstances require to be dwelt on. Thus, on the Patriarch's arriving in the Plain of Moreh, and finding the Canaanites in the land, uncertainty as to place, and doubt as to prospects of possession,

are done away by the words 'unto thy seed will I give *this* land.' In the thirteenth chapter, after the separation from Lot, this identifying declaration is renewed, with the additional element of perpetuity ('for ever'), and the first part of the original promise is pressed: 'I will make thy seed as the dust of the earth, so that if a man can number the dust of the earth, then shall thy seed also be numbered.' This, as we have seen, was given on a depressing occasion of diminution, resulting from the separation of the more worldly part of his following.

This fifteenth chapter is full of promise. It commences with the fourth clause of the original promise, that of protection, which is again dwelt on in a season of anxiety; then follows the second, that of reward, after the Patriarch's refusal of enrichment at the hands of the ungodly. In the fourth and fifth verses, the promise of extension is again brought out and advanced. The covenant of the eighteenth verse, though it defines once more the limits of outer domain, and extends

them, does not beyond this open new ground. In the seventeenth chapter, when the birth of the real heir is at hand, the first or extension clause of the original promise begins to range with the third and fifth of the higher purposes. To Abraham it is now said, 'I will make my covenant between me and thee, and will multiply thee exceedingly;' and again, 'As for me, behold, my covenant is with thee, and thou shalt be a father of many nations;' and again, 'I will make thee exceeding fruitful, and I will make nations of thee, and kings shall come out of thee. And I will establish my covenant between me and thee, and thy seed after thee in their generations for an everlasting covenant, *to be a God unto thee,* and thy seed after thee. And I will give unto thee, and to thy seed after thee, the land wherein thou art a stranger, all the land of Canaan, for an everlasting possession; and *I will be their God.*'

In the twenty-first verse this covenant is specified to Isaac as yet unborn, whose name is, like that of Jesus, well-omened, and the

## 208    Lectures on Early Scripture.

Covenant blessing is distinguished from the blessing of multiplying exceedingly. In the eighteenth verse of the eighteenth chapter, the same Covenant connection between the first and the third and fifth clauses of the original promise is introduced at the time of Abraham's intercession: 'Shall I hide from Abraham that thing which I do; seeing that Abraham shall surely become a great and mighty nation, and all the nations of the earth shall be blessed in him?'—in the twelfth verse of the twenty-first chapter, in a time of personal affliction at the prospect of parting with his son Ishmael, the limitation of the twenty-first verse of the seventeenth chapter is again expressed for consolation's sake: 'And God said unto Abraham, Let it not be grievous in thy sight because of the lad, and because of thy bondwoman; in all that Sarah hath said unto thee, hearken unto her voice; for in Isaac shall thy seed be called.'

And once more at a great crisis in the history, when the son of promise, Isaac, is, in



the twenty-second chapter typically offered, and the promise itself is renewed with special solemnity, it still does not pass beyond the outline of the original offer made to Abraham when he was invited to come out. It fills it up more completely than the intermediate revelations. It occupies the ground of nearly all preceding points. It affords in figure an expression of the final meaning of the promise; and, in the words 'Thy seed shall possess the gate of his enemies,' suggests a connection with the primeval prophecy; but it adds nothing to the substance of the Abrahamic covenant. The original revelation is thus never exceeded. It contains everything. Particulars and repetitions are given, as emergencies arise, which may strengthen the individual, or define the channels within which the grace is to flow; but the first idea maintains its ascendancy throughout, and is never departed from.

The same remark holds good in a still larger area. The first promise made to the fallen parents of the race, that the seed of the

woman should bruise the serpent's head, contains within it not less completely the sum of succeeding covenants, and all the great whole of revelation while, elaborately amplifying it into details the most minute, does not, in fact, exceed its original idea.

This feature in Scripture is of high evidential interest. It serves to bring out the unity of the design, and to show the current perpetually flowing forward from the same one source. It illustrates, in the most important subject, the way in which that current, sometimes confined within the closest family or tribal limits, sometimes appearing to lose itself in diffuse annals and biography, still perpetually preserves its unity, derives its force from its original point of movement, and advances towards its defined end. The narrative is clearly pledged to produce a given result from the very first pages. The fulness of that result may seem at times hidden away and endangered; but it is only apparently so, for, at the places where the thread of the plan seemed to be losing itself in becoming compli-

cated among the minute details of individual life, of ritualism, or national affairs, it is found, in fact, to have been accumulating fresh strength; and from the plexus of such biographies as those of Abraham and David it advances with increased power towards its final result of manifesting the whole counsel of God in Christ Jesus.

## XIX.

AFTER the confirmation of the Divine promise to the Patriarch referred to in the last Lecture, its fulfilment was still delayed. There were more lessons for faith to learn, and there was more instruction for the Church to gain in watching their teaching. 'Sarai Abram's wife bare him no children: and she had an handmaid, an Egyptian, whose name was Hagar. And Sarai said unto Abram, Behold now, the Lord hath restrained me from bearing: I pray thee go in unto my maid. It may be that I may obtain children by her. And Abram hearkened to the voice of Sarai.'\*

Sarai desired so eagerly the fulfilment of promise, that she was willing it should be accomplished even through a forbidden chan-

\* Gen. xvi. 1.

nel. Those only are safe who can be patient and obey; the designs of the Patriarch's wife were full of danger. The promise had placed before her an object; her faith had not taught her that God would accomplish it. She would herself find a way, and would risk the subversion of the whole design for which the Patriarch was set apart, that she might realise one of the steps in the process. She was so eager for the promised seed, that she would have him from the stock of Ham, and of an Egyptian mother. She would waive her claims as parent, her duties as wife, and become herself the patroness of polygamy, that she might adopt the offspring of another, and would lead her husband astray that she might gain for him the reward of faith. 'Abraham had never looked to obtain the promise by any other than a barren womb, if his own wife had not importuned him to take another. When our own apparent means fail, weak faith is put to the shifts, and projects strange devices of her own to attain her end.'\*

\* Bp. Hall's Contemplations.

It may be interesting, as unfolding another point of analogy, to observe how here Abraham, the father of faith, as originally Adam the father of nature, was tempted through the agency of the woman, and how in both cases the temptation to the woman was the desire for the immediate arrival at an expected result. In the succeeding patriarchal narratives which deal with the interior of life, we find similar difficulties resulting from similar causes. Thus, the counsel of Rebekah led to the banishment of Jacob, while it obtained for him the blessing; and the surrender of her handmaid by Rachel, that adoptive children might be secured to her, laid the foundation for a disunited family.

But there are other considerations of a more general character, and affecting the whole system of Scripture, which are connected with this transaction. The practical Christian is well aware that the Cross, though the central object of Scripture, is not its final limit. It is itself the cause and introduction of a further part of the Divine work. It leads

to the dispensation of the Holy Spirit. The Gospel comprises for us not only pardon for sin, but renewal of the affections—a gradual rising up again of the heart's desires from the longing for sinful pleasures to hunger and thirst after righteousness, from indulgences condemned while they please, to duties which though they press us, we approve. It is part of its mission to take from the individual his selfish aims, his narrow jealousies, his weak fears, his wayward course; to set him forward with a clear map of life before him, a plain path marked out to journey in, a steadfast heart and undeterred purpose; to give him not only the most splendid termination to his pilgrimage, but many opportunities of pausing by the road to do kind and generous service to his fellow-wayfarers. It thus, in proportion to the extent of its acceptance, tends to soften the hard lot of the poor, to suppress the outbursts of cruelty, to foster an organised opposition to vice, to ameliorate in every way those evils which the fallen state has rendered possible.

One thing, then, is clear. Since this is the work which the Gospel has to do, since it has not merely Christ's Cross to set up as the central fact on which the eye of faith is to dwell, but since it has also to establish those great principles of morality on which the advancement and happiness of individuals and communities depend—principles which for the individual are part of the legacy of peace left among the shadows of his Cross by Christ to his own, and which for communities are the benefits reflected on them from the Gospel system at work within them—we may reasonably expect that, just as we find traces of one part of the Divine plan (the sacrifice) pervading Scripture from the very first, so also we shall find traces of the other part (the moral system) beginning to show themselves also from the very first. We have some sort of right, if we use it discreetly, to go back to the beginning of Scripture, and to say, 'Show us here, not only one part of the plan for man's restitution, but the whole of it, marked out and at work, if



only in some faint way, even in these early pages. Allow for great differences in all things which depend on habits of life, and which may be expected to fluctuate, but show us that beneath all incidental varieties there is to be found one essential unity, one harmonious tone, which, however it may be concealed or suppressed, yet runs consistently from the first through the whole volume.'

This we take to be a fair challenge; and we consider this chapter to be one of the full answers which early Scripture is constantly giving to it. It does so here in the following respect. It may be laid down as an ascertained result of statistical inquiry that it is a decree written in Nature, and unmistakably evidenced by the generally equal numbers of the sexes, that their union should be in marriages of one man with one wife. No other arrangement is provided for by Nature, and, if any other be generally adopted, the balance of population begins at once to be disturbed, and the replenishment of the earth is retarded.

## 218    Lectures on Early Scripture.

In addition to the above natural difficulties, it is found, as a result of historical experience, that all breaches of this law tend further to introduce very grave moral and domestic results, and so become not merely an interference with the development of mankind, but also with the stability of their happiness. And yet, while it is, for the above reasons, so imperatively requisite that this natural law of the union of one husband with one wife should be scrupulously respected, there is only too much probability that one of the first points on which humanity would show its weakness would be in breaking this very rule. The experience of as much history as is open to us, while on the one hand it shows how the great motive forces contained in the sanctions of law, the sentiments of chivalry, the principles of revelation, have been found even up to the present time only partly successful in securing to woman those prerogatives which are clearly hers by all right, shows on the other hand how prone man is, in concession to his animal instincts, even in highly-organised

communities, but far more in rudimentary societies, to avail himself of his power and his craft to procure personal indulgence at the expense of the highest interests. There are even in the earliest pages of Scripture signs that the original sanctity of the marriage union was beginning to disappear, and that alliances were soon formed without reference to its requirements. The cases mentioned in the fourth and sixth chapters of Genesis may be considered as approaching to this ; and at the time when Abraham lived it is evident, from the way in which Sarah was taken into the houses of Pharaoh and Abimelech, and not less so from her offer of Hagar, which was accepted by the Patriarch, that very lax notions on this important matter were then generally prevalent.

While it is not unlikely, from the wording of the passage, that it was intended to show that this proposal of a way in which the Divine promise of a son might be accomplished altogether originated with Sarah, and that the responsibility of it, as in the

case of Eve, was, in the first instance, hers, it is not the less evident that the Patriarch admitted the idea, and supposed with Sarah that in such a way the blessing might be obtained. Had the birth of Isaac, Sarah's own son, been altogether expunged from the narrative, and Ishmael, the illegitimate son, described as the child of the covenant, according to the wish of his father, there would have been no age, between that time and John the Baptist, in which ordinary men would have put their hand upon this paragraph and said, 'Here is, in a moral point of view, a flaw and radical defect in your whole scheme.' No recension merely human undertaken within that epoch would have sought a revision of this detail. It would have satisfied the prevailing tone of the times, and yet it would have been a grave objection to the whole system of earlier Scripture, for it would have shown it not only out of harmony (for that some things in earlier Scripture may be expected to be), but *content* to be out of harmony both with the naturally appointed

order, and also with the holy teachings of Christ.\*

It is a matter, then, of congratulation and of strong confirmation when we find that, long before the best men were aware of the weight of the objection, Scripture was refusing to ally itself with arrangements which, though they afforded an easier natural fulfilment of promise, and in a way not disapproved in those ages, would yet have been discordant with the clear and beautiful utterances which the Divine oracles were in subsequent ages about to give forth, and on the reception of which in their fulness the very security of those future blessings on account of which the Patriarch was set apart would not a little depend. We may be thankful to find that at this early date not only was the Cross of Christ casting its solemn shadow over the Divine pages, but also that the sacred principles which Christ has won for us as the basis of our own private and social life were beginning to be rescued from that moral

\* Matt. xix. 8, 9.

discord which had ended in the destruction of the men of the first dispensation, and which had also deeply depraved those of the second, and that it was not permitted that the founder of the third dispensation should transmit the blessings of the covenant through an unsanctioned channel.

It would be difficult to pass from the incidents recorded in this seventeenth chapter of Genesis without pausing to consider, reverently and with caution, that allegorical meaning which there is reason to suppose they contain. One has said, 'Inasmuch as the family of Abraham was the true Church of the time then present, there is very little doubt but that the principal and specially memorable events which happened in it are for us so many types. As, therefore, in circumcision, in sacrifices, in the whole system of the Levitical priesthood, there was allegory, and as the same is the case in our present sacraments, so I assert was it also the case in the house of Abraham.'\*

\* Calvin.

If it be true, then, that wherever the Church, which is the house and family of God, may be, there the presence of God will be also, filling all things with echoes and reflections of Himself, and with miniatures of that universal plan which He has ordained in the Saviour; or if in a less general way it be true that those incidents divinely chosen to be recorded in Scripture so happened as facts, and were so selected for transmission, that they contain not only preparations, but also representations of the great work of salvation, and thus become both illustrations and anticipatory expressions of the ways of God, and also confirmations of the faith to those who note how 'the secrets of wisdom are double to that which is,'\* then in such case we may expect to find the house of Abraham full of Christ, and the point will be to discover on what scale the interpretation is to be framed, so as to draw out from the text neither more nor less than may be fit.

There is very important assistance furnished

\* Job xi. 6.

in this respect by the fourth chapter of the Epistle to the Galatians, in which the allegorical exposition of the passage is authoritatively supplied. By that passage it appears that, as the father of the faithful had two sons, one the son of the bondwoman according to the flesh, which son was a bondson, the other the son of the free woman according to the promise, which son was free, so for the body of the faithful there have been two covenants, the one the covenant of Sinai (represented by Hagar), which is carnal or of bondage, and which is continued in the earthly Jerusalem, connected as it is with Sinai, and which is in spiritual bondage with its children; the other, the covenant of the heavenly Jerusalem and spiritual promise (which is represented by Sarah), and whose children, the Christians, are spiritually free. The Apostle goes on to show, that not only do the two mothers represent two covenants, and the sons two separate sorts of men, but also that the actions recorded in the Old Testament account of them, represent the spiritual re-



lations of these two sorts of men; so that when of old Ishmael persecuted Isaac, such conduct represented the persecution of the spiritual by the carnal in the later times of the Church. The expulsion, which was the result of Ishmael's conduct, is also taken as connected with this meaning, and the Apostle builds on it the exhortation to cast out the son of the bondwoman, the flesh, and to walk in the freedom of the Spirit.

It is a point, however, of considerable importance to ascertain how far such a method of application may be with prudence carried. On the one hand, it has been attempted to assign to every incident in the Old Testament narratives a definite allegorical meaning; while, on the other hand, it has been asserted that nothing is to be considered susceptible of an allegorical interpretation, except what inspired writers have themselves so interpreted.

If, without adopting either of these extreme views, both of which have met with considerable disapproval, it be held that where certain

## 226    Lectures on Early Scripture.

persons and incidents have been interpreted allegorically by inspired writers, other incidents in which the same persons are concerned, occurring at the same time and in the same connection, may also be regarded as charged with a relatively allegorical meaning, there may in such case be found traces of interesting resemblances in this sixteenth chapter of Genesis.

Here for the first time in Scripture we meet with an angelic appearance, and it has been considered that the angel introduced in the seventh verse is the Lord Jesus Christ, according to that which is written in the thirteenth verse, 'She called the name of the Lord that spake unto her, Thou God seest me.' The promise to her is exceeding multiplication of her children; the birth of a son whose name shall signify that the Lord hath heard the voice of her affliction, who shall be a wild man opposed to all and by all, and who shall still be sustained in the presence of all his brethren.

The historical fulfilment of this prophecy is

sufficiently clear. The Arab descendants of Ishmael have ever partaken of the character assigned to their progenitor, and are known also to have stood their ground successfully against all efforts to subdue them. If, again, the allegorical meaning of the chapter as interpreted by the Apostle Paul be carried on, Ishmael would, according to his scale of rendering, represent the Jew, whose isolation of position, hostility to all other nations, and general unpopularity would find in him a fitting symbol; and whose continuance even to the present day, notwithstanding all persecutions, a separate community, dwelling apart, and yet in the midst of every other nation, would be well delineated by the words, 'He shall dwell in the presence of all his brethren;' while the declaration that the Lord hath heard the voice of Hagar's affliction, and the answer recording her sense of the fearful presence of God, which are expressed in two names given, may shadow forth the trust of awe on the human side, and on the

## 228    Lectures on Early Scripture.

other the Divine purpose of a final restoration of Israel.

But be this as it may, it is certainly to be noted for historical purposes how to the Egyptian woman, wandering away from the spot where God was known, and seeking again her own land, the Lord appeared in the desert, with words of encouragement and promise for the future, and with a rule of present obedience. In her the races of Shem and Ham were to be united. Her offspring was about to be the first child of circumcision; his descendants, not less than the descendants of Isaac, Abraham's other son, would thereafter show invincible tenacity of national life. They also would be great champions of the unity of God. Within Hagar's bosom was the germ of the great Mohammedan race. When we remember this, and observe how remarkably this episode is introduced into the Scripture, we seem to discern that the Saviour is already intimating a purpose, and that He would not exclude the children from His meaning when he says to the mother, 'The

Lord hath heard thy affliction.' Already, even before the covenant is ratified with the Jew, He is here found treating separately with the Gentile. He is seen and named by the Hamite slave in her affliction. The Saviour and suffering humanity are united. On the one the assurance is, 'The Lord hath heard thee;' on the other the conviction is, The Lord seeth me. Already we may note the dimensions of that plan which is elsewhere described, 'In an acceptable time have I heard thee, and in a day of salvation have I helped thee: and I will preserve thee, and give thee for a covenant of the people, to establish (raise up) the earth, and to cause to inherit the desolate heritages.'\*

\* Isaiah xlix. 8.

## XX.

IN forming our estimate of the spiritual conflict in which Abraham, the father of the faithful, was engaged, it is important to observe the periods of time into which his history divides itself. After his first departure from Haran in obedience to God's command, and in expectation of the promised blessing, it appears that he had, for about ten years, awaited the birth of an heir; at the expiration of that time he had, by the suggestion of his wife Sarah, allied himself with Hagar, the Egyptian bondmaid—a step which, by its consequences, soon proved itself to be of unauthorised suggestion, as it brought rivalry and heartburnings upon her who suggested it; upon Abraham the disturbance of a divided home and wounded affections; and upon Hagar hardship and privations. When the latter returned from the

wilderness to the tents of Abraham she would, in all probability, make known the circumstances of the Divine visitation in the desert, and the nature of the Divine promise imparted to her. This promise, which bore in its temporal aspects a close resemblance to those previously made to the Patriarch, might probably help to satisfy those interested that the expected 'blessing was in progress of performance, and induce them the more confidently to recognise in the child Ishmael the longed-for seed.

For about fourteen years this household, containing within it such elements of discord, and which, weak in faith and in the insight which faith gives, had sought to realise the blessing by these imperfect steps, continued its unsanctioned course. It is observable that during the whole of this long period, as before during the stay in Egypt, there is no sign in the narrative of God's visitation among them. At length, when Abraham had attained his ninety-ninth year, and the probabilities of further offspring were diminished to a very

low degree, God is described as again appearing to the Patriarch with words which, while they lay out once more the promise to which his faith should cling, seem at the same time to imply censure of his previous shortcomings.

The words run thus: 'I am the Almighty God;'<sup>\*</sup> and this dwelling upon the all-prevailing power of God is as though it were to be explained to Abraham that indirect courses, such as those he had followed, were needless and ineffectual, since 'what He had promised, that He was able also to perform'—an impression which we are assured was in fact left upon the Patriarch's mind by this visitation.<sup>†</sup>

The words continue, 'Walk before Me, and be thou perfect,' וְהָיָה כָּמֹנִי, thus pressing the same idea to its results, and constituting a call to a full surrender of the life and heart, in opposition to the temporising policy of expediency which had theretofore shown itself as a

<sup>\*</sup> אֵל שַׁדַּי. See also Exodus vi. 3.

<sup>†</sup> Romans iv. 21.



weakness in the Believer. In the spirit of this covenant it is written in the eighteenth Psalm, 'With an upright man thou wilt show thyself upright;'\* and our Lord claims the same sort of allegiance from His followers, 'Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father in heaven is perfect;'+ not thereby requiring perfection, but a whole-hearted as distinguished from a partial and one-sided service. With these conditions God now offers Himself more fully as the God of Abraham's family, giving them the claim to be His people, and the names of Abraham and Sarah are changed, indicating the greatness of the crisis.‡

Isaac is now promised, whose name signifies 'rejoicing,' and the prospect of whose birth is welcomed with delight by the Patriarch, though the fulness of exultation to which an unwavering faith would have been entitled,

\* עִם-יָשָׁר תִּהְיֶה יְשָׁרָה.

† Matt. v. 48. τέλει.

‡ Isaiah viii. 18. 'Omnia resonant novitatem et in testamento vetere obumbratur novum.'—August. *De Civitat. Dei*, xvi. 28.

## 234 Lectures on Early Scripture.

is in his case tempered with anxiety for his son Ishmael, his former weakness thus leaving an alloy in his happiness. At about the age at which youths under the approaching Jewish system would be presented before God, Ishmael is formally rejected from the great covenant, the work of human policy is set aside, and the son after the flesh is relegated to the temporal promises, while to the son after the spirit are limited the spiritual prospects of the future. Thus faith is brought back to regard its true object, and the narrative, disembarassing itself from the worldly element, at once advances towards its great end.

At this time, when Isaac, the typical representative of the promised seed, is about to be introduced—when these ‘glad tidings of great joy’ to these ancient shepherds and all people have been rejoiced over (verse 17)—when a rule for a new devotedness of personal life has been laid down, and new names have been assigned to those who are entering on a fresh phase of relationship, a further act is

brought in by the narrative—the rite of circumcision, which is described as the covenant (verse 10), or token of the covenant (verse 11), between God and His people. In the rite itself there seems something picturing the character of the covenant for which it stands, and which thus rendered the act a specially appropriate emblem. In allusion to this, one of our own divines speaks of its first use as ‘a sacramental rescinding the impure reliques of Adam and the contractions of evil customs;’\* and ‘as the express and sacramental abscission of sin:’ while another, carrying the idea further on, says, ‘The wound was not so grievous as the signification was comfortable; for herein he saw that from his loins should come the blessed seed which should purge his soul from all corruption.†

\* Jer. Taylor, II. 67.

† Bp. Hall, *Contempl.* Just. Mart., *Quæst. et Respons. ad Orthodox.* cii. : καὶ πιστεύσας Θεῷ παρὰ τὸν χρόνον τῆς ἡλικίας εἶσθαι πατὴρ τοῦ ἐκ τῆς γεγηρακίας στείρας αὐτῷ γενομένου υἱοῦ, eam ob causam αὐτῷ ὁ Θεὸς σφραγίδα ταύτης fidei dedit τὴν περιτομὴν τῆς ἀκροβυστίας μορίου

The person who, though a stranger, should receive circumcision, became a partaker of the promises;\* while any of the seed of Abraham who neglected it was to become as a stranger cut off from the people.† And yet, though its outward administration was thus necessary, it was by itself incomplete, and required to be further connected with certain inward dispositions in him who had received it. Thus St. Paul argues, ‘Circumcision verily profiteth if thou keep the law, but if thou be a breaker of the law thy circumcision is made uncircumcision.’‡

It is evident, then, that we have here, introduced at the very threshold of the dis-

*τοῦ διὰ μὲν τὸ γῆρας πρὸς παιδοποιῖαν ἀχρήστου γενομένου, διὰ δὲ τὴν πίστιν τοῦ Ἀβραάμ εἰς παιδοποιῖαν γεγονότος χρησίμου. παρέπεμψε δὲ ταύτην τὴν περιτομὴν εἰς ὅλον τὸ γένος τὸ ἐκ τοῦ πατρὸς γενομένου, ὑφιστάμενον εἰς ἀνεξάλειπτον μνημόσυνον τῆς τε τοῦ Ἀβραάμ πίστεως, καὶ τῆς τοῦ Θεοῦ δυνάμεως, τοῦ ζωοποιῶντος τοὺς νεκροὺς, καὶ καλοῦντος τὰ μὴ ὄντα ὡς ὄντα.*

\* Ex. xii. 48.

† Gen. xvii. 14. Ex. iv. 24.

‡ Rom. ii. 25.

pensation, a sacrament in the sense in which our own Church applies the term requiring an outward sign and an inward grace,\* and instituted by God Himself, an act necessary to be performed, and yet without value, unless coupled with a corresponding condition of heart. And it is worthy of being observed that this sacrament, though accepted into the subsequent legal system, is altogether antecedent to it, being presented here to the Church in company with the great requirements of holy living and faith which are grouped around the advent of Isaac, the typical representative of the Messiah. And this, as well as the fact of the Passover being also instituted prior to the giving of the law, should be well weighed by those who are inclined to regard the corresponding sacrament in the Christian Church, i.e. Baptism, and the Sacraments generally, with some indifference as savouring of legality.

\* It was a seal of the righteousness of faith which God had made to be the spirit and life of the covenant.—  
Bp. J. Taylor, II. 237.

## 238 Lectures on Early Scripture.

That circumcision from the first was considered among Christians as having been the forerunner, even if not strictly the type of baptism,\* there can be no doubt, for St. Paul himself draws the parallel between it and the Christian Sacrament: 'And ye are complete in Him, which is the head of all principality and power: in whom also ye are circumcised with the circumcision made without hands, in putting off the body of the sins of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ: buried with him in baptism.'† And the same views have always prevailed as to connexion between the Passover and the Supper of the Lord. In this latter case, indeed, the points of relationship appear on the surface. The Passover, like the Eucharist, is described as of Divine appointment, and as the one commemorated deliverance from temporal, so did the other

\* Bp. Jer. Taylor, *ubi sup.*

† Col. ii. 10—12. Isidore of Pélusium, 1 Ep. 125, ἀντὶ βαπτίσματος τῇ περιτομῇ Ἰουδαῖοι ἐκέχρηστο, 'The Jews used circumcision instead of Baptism,' in reference to which Epiphanius styles Baptism μεγάλην περιτομήν, 'the great circumcision.' — See Hammond's *Infant Baptism*.

from spiritual bondage. Both were in a sort federal acts between God and man ; both required certain preliminaries of life and covenant position, as previous circumcision and baptism, previous legal cleansing,\* and spiritual preparation, and the Eucharist is also attached to the Passover in its origin by circumstances evidently intended to suggest this connexion.†

The relationship between circumcision and baptism, though in substance equally complete, is yet less direct externally, since the outer part of the rite in baptism is adopted from the lavations of proselytes, under the Jewish system. But the more important idea was under that system contained in the circumcision, which accompanied the lavations, and was the principal rite ; and that idea comprised, as does baptism, an entrance into covenant, and a participation in covenant blessings, privileges, and duties.

\* Numb. ix. 6.

† See a summary of them in Bp. Waterland on the Eucharist, ch. ii.

It is therefore an important point of analogy that there are thus found under the Old Testament system and antecedent to the Mosaic Law two sacramental institutions — the one connected with the commencement of the religious life, and the other with its continuance, which bear so close a proportionate resemblance to the two great sacramental institutions of the New Testament. This coincidence cannot be explained away by the supposition that the New Testament sacraments are mere adaptations of those of the Old Testament introduced as useful for the purposes of initiation and continuance of communion ; for such they cannot fairly be described as being, since it has appeared that one of these sacraments, baptism, is not externally an adaptation at all, although it bears a substantial resemblance to the corresponding Old Testament rite ; and indeed, any such notion with regard to the origin of the Christian sacraments is inadmissible, since they are in their meaning connected with the two distinctive features of the New Testament, and two great points



of Christianity, viz. the work of Christ and the work of the Holy Spirit, and were instituted and practised before their full significance was commonly attached to them.

It must be allowed, then, that we have two sacraments in each covenant representing the essential ideas in each; and with a certain outer resemblance in each: the outer parts of the former rising by an easy transition into the outer parts of the latter—the inner parts of the former developing into the inner meanings of the latter. Thus these two sets of sacraments so closely connected—both declared essential—claiming to be of divine institution, and, indeed, so originating as to preclude the idea of their being mere ecclesiastical arrangements, serve to knit together the two systems, and afford important evidence to the candid enquirer of the essential unity which underlies the scriptures of the Old and New Testaments.

## XXI.

CIRCUMCISION being the outward expression of a new and closer relationship, we observe that, immediately after its administration, the Divine manifestations are made to Abraham in a more intimate and familiar manner, and that they bear a nearer resemblance to the great coming manifestation of Christ in the flesh. These supernatural elements in the eighteenth and nineteenth chapters of Genesis are so connected, and the action so completely depends on them, that the two chapters may be advantageously considered together.

One of the first points which presents itself is the parallelism or contrast between Abraham and Lot. The chapters both start from the virtue of hospitality, which, under the ancient arrangements of life, would itself comprise so large an external part of the great work of

charity. The two patriarchs are found in the commencement of the two chapters alike prepared to exercise it; for the contrasts between them are rather between the inner life of the true believer represented by Abraham, and that of the temporising believer prefigured in Lot, even as the events which occur to them express the different fortunes resulting from these qualities, and about to chequer the career of the future church. Possibly a note of this difference between the two men may already be found in the circumstance, that while Abraham is sitting watching at the tent-door to perform the duties of hospitality, in the heat of the day, Lot is introduced as waiting in the gate of Sodom for a similar purpose in the freshness of the evening; so, again, when the angels depart, Abraham voluntarily goes with them 'to bring them on the way;' but Lot, though he had just before risen to courage and devotion in defence of his guests, yet, when the moment has come to leave the city, so lingers that they have to 'lay hold upon his hand and

bring him forth.' Though ready at the utmost risk to protect the strangers unknown, he is presently found full of fear when they are known and should have inspired confidence. While he expresses gratitude for the mercy they have shown in saving his life, he is yet anxious lest, if he go where they would take him, he may lose his life.

Again, when a revelation is made to Abraham of the purpose of God toward Sodom, he at once avails himself of it to intercede powerfully for the devoted city. When a similar revelation is made to Lot, though he is expressly invited to save those related to him, his advocacy is so ineffectual that he 'seemed as one that mocked unto them,' which is little to be wondered at, as he was himself but half willing to be saved. The Lord knew that Abraham 'would command his children and his household after him, and they should keep the way of the Lord to do justice and judgment.'\* But though Lot is

\* St. Peter, Epist. ii. chap. ii., applies to the inhabitants of Sodom the epithet *ἀθεσμοι*, 'homines nefarii

in the New Testament described as personally distressed at the conduct of his fellow-citizens, it would appear, from the surprise which his expostulation occasioned, that it was not common for him to offer it; and it was also the case that his own family bore no fruit of holy training. The form of the sentence in St. Peter, in which these troubles of Lot are mentioned, is observed by grammarians to be peculiar; the suffering occasioned by the lawlessness around being described as a deliberate act inflicted by Lot upon himself, under which form a meaning may well be contained, expressive of the self-occasioned anxieties of the man, who, with a knowledge of right, abstinence from the grosser forms of sin, the remembrance of better times and purer communion, is yet seduced by the desire of collateral advantage into associations which conscience cannot approve, and which therefore, though persisted in, occasion perpetual misgivings. The declension of Lot's descendants *qui nec jus nec fas curant*; 'thus placing them in exact opposition to the qualities here commended.

## 246    Lectures on Early Scripture.

may be traced back to the failure of faith in their ancestor. The rise of the family of Abraham is divinely referred to the conduct of that patriarch. 'Abraham,' it is written, 'shall surely become a great and mighty nation, and all the nations of the earth shall be blessed in him.' The reason given is noteworthy—'For I know him;' his character is such 'that he will command his children and his household after him;' and, his conduct and influence are such that 'they shall keep the way of the Lord to do justice and judgment;' and this keeping of the Lord's way will be the instrumental cause both of their blessing and their progenitor's reward, 'that the Lord may bring upon Abraham that which he hath spoken of him.'

The plan of operation which is here incidentally expressed, is one from which no departure is made in Scripture; from a single faithful leader obedient followers carry on the work of faith, and in its execution they are themselves blessed. It is so under the Abrahamic covenant, the Mosaic, and the

Christian; and it is only in proportion as individuals and communities swerve from their first simplicity of allegiance, that they interpose obstacles between themselves and the blessing. Such a system is very far removed from any fatalistic arrangements. It is indeed consistent, even to our limited view, with the strictest equity and benevolence.

We have now to consider the immediate method of this revelation to Abraham. The chapter begins by the declaration that 'the Lord appeared to him, and, lo! three men stood by him.' We observe that his attention is from the first directed to one of the three, whom he addresses by the title, 'My Lord.' The two others are considered by him but as companions. It is this one only of the three who speaks,\* and he always speaks as God himself. When they go toward Sodom, Abraham stands yet before the Lord, and two only enter the city. In the eighteenth

\* See Hengstenberg's Christology.

chapter, in the description of the three the word angels is avoided, for this term would only have been properly applicable in the same sense to two out of the number ; but in the nineteenth chapter, where this reason does not apply, the two who enter the city are called angels. There is abundant cause to see here, as in other places,\* in this principal one of the three, the Angel of the Lord, the revealed Son or Logos of the New Testament, ' who has been the Mediator in all God's relations to the world—who at all times, and even before He became man in Christ, has been the light of the world—and to whom specially was committed the direction of the economy of the old covenant.'†

When the above is borne in mind, the representative nature of the transaction becomes apparent, and the relative position of the characters is found to be exactly maintained.

\* Gen. xvi. 13 ; Gen. xxxi. 11 ; Gen. xxxii. 24 ; Gen. xlviii. 15, 16 ; Exod. xxiii. 20, 21 ; Exod. xxxii. and xxxiii.

† Hengstenberg, *ubi sup.*



The Lord declares His purpose, and the prayer of faith is offered in intercession. This early prayer contains already great things. The righteous are by it seen as separated from the wicked in the judgment of God. The infinite distance between the creature and Creator is recognised even in the hour of the most condescending revelations; and the claim that the unworthy should be spared for the righteous' sake, is plainly advanced and perseveringly pleaded. It is deeply interesting to observe here Faith in the presence of the Saviour, who encourages in it the idea of intercession, leading it towards the central truths of religion. It cannot, however, prior to more express revelation, rise to the full height of intercessory supplication. It cannot yet conceive the value of the one holy and just in man's emergency; when its prayer that for ten righteous men's sake the city should be spared, has been accepted, it can adventure nothing further, and the interview is at this point brought to an end; but 'God did not go away until Abraham had said all he had

to say, for He is never weary of hearing prayer.\*

If we regard these circumstances as a representation by figure of the great points in religion—of sin, of divine discrimination, of intercession, and of judgment, we have in the closing circumstance of the destruction of the cities a very appropriate completion of the allegory, as well as a prophetic representation of the final judgment.

In its historical value, and in its connection with the work of religion, both at the time and generally, it is of much importance. Occurring at a central place, which was within reach of the rising Eastern nations on the one side,† and of Egypt on the other, the judgment must have been matter of great publicity, while its peculiar nature must have rendered it more easily distinguishable from the ordinary arrangements of Providence. It is an instance of that Divine dealing which found a further exemplification in the fate of

\* M. Henry.

† See Gen. chap. xiv.

Korah: 'If these men die the common death of all men, or if they be visited after the visitation of all men; then the Lord hath not sent me. But if the Lord make a new thing, and the earth open her mouth, and swallow them up, with all that appertain unto them, and they go down quick into the pit; then ye shall understand that these men have provoked the Lord.' \*

It is also, as it stands in Scripture, the closing scene of the career of postdiluvian depravity, as the deluge was of the sins before the flood, and as Noah had in the one both separated himself and builded an ark to the saving of his house, so in the other there is found one who, separated with his family from the depravity around him, is engaged in the act of intercession when the calamity occurs. The destruction of the city of Jerusalem and the dispersion of the Jews is found as a corresponding act at the end of the Jewish system, with a higher fulfilment of inter-

\* Numb. xvi. 29, 30.

## 252    Lectures on Early Scripture.

cession and escape ; and the whole series of harmonies is bound together by the New Testament prophecies, which show the order of events at the final judgment as a completion on the most extensive scale of the idea partially realised in these temporal visitations.

## XXII.

THE intercession of Lot on behalf of Zoar, unlike that of Abraham on behalf of Sodom, had been for his own sake. With that timidity which was part of the weakness of his religious character, he had feared the mountains, to which his flight had been at first directed, and had accordingly been promised safety for the little town. But here again the same weakness pursued him, and the very spot which he had at first desired for safety, and which had been at his prayer assured to him by the Angel as safe, soon began to appear perilous, and he fled from it to a solitude where evils overtook him which, had he remained among men, he would probably have escaped.

After this, in the twentieth chapter of Genesis, we find Abraham, under the in-

fluence, perhaps, of a similar anxiety as to safety, removing farther from the scene of the calamity, and journeying towards the south. By one of those rapid transitions from strength to weakness, which mark so strangely the record of his career, he who had hitherto dwelt apart in tents, and had so recently seen the destruction of the cities of the ungodly, is now found sojourning in Gerar, the Philistine town. It is true that its prince can describe his subjects as 'a righteous nation,' but such was not Abraham's impression when he went in to sojourn there; for he admits that he 'thought, Surely the fear of God is not in this place.' (Ver. 11.)

If fear brought him there, fear betrayed him there; for under the influence of apprehension for his life he again, as in Egypt, denies his wife, and she is an accomplice in the fraud. Their deceit is, through Divine intervention, discovered and rebuked. A change so sudden from the heights of faith to worldliness jars, and appears improbable. But it is this very circumstance which gives

it value as evidence of the integrity of the narrative ; for not only is their candour and good faith to be inferred, who in the construction of such a narrative so plainly depicted one of its principal heroes, but further, these very failures themselves, while they fall short of that which we desire to find in a faithful man, yet fully coincide with what we do actually observe in such a character ; for not only among the Bible heroes generally, but among Christians, as we ourselves actually see them to be, the falls from grace frequently succeed its highest achievements, so as to make the believer's conduct, in one phase, a complete contrast to that which it had been in another.

The transaction between Abraham and Abimelech ends by the latter, as a prince, offering land, cattle, and servants ; while the former, as a prophet, intercedes in his behalf. It is to Abraham that this title of prophet is first given in Scripture—presenting him as a subordinate mediator both in his intercessory office, in the communications made to

him, and in his representative action. It is to be remarked here, that whereas Abraham failed as an intercessor on behalf of Sodom from his connecting the idea of the value of intercession with human merit—a failure which may, perhaps, have been the beginning of his decline—he is on this occasion required to act as intercessor at the very time, and under circumstances which must have led to his disconnecting the two ideas. Thus the action is advanced a step forward, and while he discharged the prophetic office—as did Moses for Miriam, and Job for his friends—he is taught, and the Church through him, that the value of the supplication is dependent, not on man, but on God; since the righteous man here needs intercession on his behalf, and he who in the transaction was unrighteous is called on to act as intercessor.

It is observable that in the whole of this transaction with Abimelech, as previously in Egypt, in both which cases Abraham acted by policy instead of faith, there is no mention of an appearance of God to him. Nor from



this time forth is any further revelation vouchsafed to him until many years have passed, with the exception of one of a minor character, introduced to press him to the recognition of Isaac as his sole heir, which, though according to the express purport of the covenant, was an occasion of hesitation and difficulty to his faith.

After the incident of Abimelech, the birth of Isaac is the next point dwelt on by the sacred narrative ; and peculiar stress is laid on the extraordinary character of such a birth, as being both beyond the course of nature (ch. xxi. 7), and also by the direct visitation of God,\* a peculiarity which even in infancy raises Isaac to eminence as a type of the birth of Messiah.

We arrive next at a point when, a stage in the early life of the child being completed, the son of promise is weaned. A festival of rejoicing is held in the infant church, at which the son of the bondwoman is found

\* κατὰ πνεῦμα γεννηθεῖς. Gal. iv. 29.

## 258 Lectures on Early Scripture.

opposed to and mocking the child of the freewoman. 'He that was born after the flesh persecuted him that was born after the spirit.'\* We must require ourselves, in estimating such passages, to regard the facts not only in their simple exterior, but in their expressive power as symbols. It may be intended that the act of Ishmael should represent the persecutions which the Saviour, and afterwards the church in the season of defencelessness, should undergo at the hands of Judaism and the world. The decision of Sarah, 'Cast out this bondwoman and her son, for the son of this bondwoman shall not be heir with my son, even with Isaac,' is confirmed by the word of God, 'In all that Sarah hath said unto thee, hearken unto her voice, for in Isaac shall thy seed be called' (ver. 12). Abraham obeys, rising early in the morning, furnishes bread and water, sends

\* Gal. iv. 29, *ἑδίδωκεν*, *פָּחַד*, The force of the word is ascertainable from Gen. xix. 14, where Lot, warning his sons-in-law of the coming destruction, seemed unto them 'as one that mocked,' *כְּצַחֵק*

Hagar and the child away, and she goes forth wandering in the wilderness—‘And the water was spent in the bottle, and she cast the child under one of the shrubs. And she went and sat her down over against him a good way off, as it were a bowshot, for she said, Let me not see the death of the child. And she sat over against him, and lift up her voice and wept.’ (Ver. 15.)

Under these simple outlines may be traceable, first, the form of Judaism failing in the presence of a law which could not give life, and of which Ishmael was an allegorical representative; and then, more generally, the form of the Gentile world of which he was an historical representative, and which, born in bondage of the flesh, was for long to languish in the wilderness of the world, without the means of spiritual life. The Angel of the Lord had before the birth of a child appeared to Hagar (ch. xvi.), as He had also appeared to Abraham (ch. xvii.), in both cases with a similar promise concerning the two sons; the Angel of the Lord now calls

## 260    Lectures on Early Scripture.

out of heaven to Hagar (ch. xxi.) to save the life of her child, as He will at a later period (ch. xxii. 15) call out of heaven to save the life of Isaac. These four appearances, thus related to each other, stand by themselves. In each case the first appearance is to the Gentile, even as subsequently, in order of occurrence, the first acceptance of the manifested God is on the part of the Gentiles. 'And God opened her eyes, and she saw a well of water;' under which usual figure of the well of water in the desert may be delineated the waters of salvation, in which the regenerated world, divinely led, is to see its desired object and live.

In contrast with the forlorn outcasts thus brought to a well of water by the Angel of the Lord, there is next placed the patriarch from whom they had gone forth, who is engaging himself in covenant with the Philistines, and arranging with them for the possession of a well of water; and the whole subject closes with remarkable words: 'And

Lecture the Twenty-second. 261

Abraham planted a grove in Beersheba (the well of the oath), and called there on the name of the Lord, the everlasting God. And Abraham sojourned in the Philistines' land many days.'

## XXIII.

AFTER a pause of years in duration, the period at length arrives at which the most solemn act of Abraham's career is to occur. As before, after a similar pause, which had succeeded upon a declension of faith, God had appeared to him with words of exhortation to faith and entire surrender (ch. xvii.), now again we read that God did tempt or try him in the matter of faith, commanding him to take his *son*, his *only* son, whom he *loved*, to go into the land of Moriah, and offer him there for a burnt-offering upon one of the mountains which God would tell him of (ch. xxii.). As before he had risen up early when Ishmael was to be surrendered, now he rises up early with diligent spirit to surrender Isaac; and this time there is not any note that his chastened faith repined.

And now Isaac, who had already in his birth resembled the Saviour, is further to resemble him in death ; in death allowed by a father, in death at a special place, and in death as a sacrifice. At about the age at which Ishmael, the founder of one great nation, had been at the gate of death, Isaac, the founder of a greater, is also to stand there, even as He who, about to join together their divided lines in that greatest community which He should form, would Himself pass within the gates of death.

The weakness of Abraham had, in earlier trials—as, for instance, in the city of Gerar—led him into securing himself and his purpose by undue means. Anxiety for his own safety, dread of losing his wife, to whom the promised seed had been already limited, may have influenced him, and his instability may have been partly caused by his fear that this greatly desired blessing might be lost ; but now these misgivings have passed away, and a higher state is evidently attained. This is clearly marked also in the Epistle to the Hebrews.

## 264    Lectures on Early Scripture.

‘He that had received the promises offered up his only begotten son, of whom it was said, That in Israel shall thy seed be called : accounting that God was able to raise him up, even from the dead’ (Heb. xi. 17). And the passage proceeds, ‘from whence also he received him in a figure.’

With regard to this figure, it is to be remembered that the types of the Old Testament picturing beforehand the events of the New Testament, are from the very nature of the case, in some degree inadequate to give their exact outline. This inability appears most strongly in cases where the Gospel event which is to be shadowed out is complex instead of simple. One of the methods then used for overcoming their weakness of expression is by supplementing or doubling the machinery of the type. Thus, for instance, when the object is in the Old Testament to express by a typical transaction the Gospel truth of sin pardoned by a sacrifice, then a lamb bleeding on the altar suffices ; but when the Gospel is to be brought out in a more



detailed manner, and the idea is of a victim slain for the sins of the people, and the guilt of all their transgressions taken away by that death, imputed to them no more, but laid on the victim in their stead, then the single type would fail in power of expression, and (as in Levit. xvi.) recourse is had to a different expedient. Two victims are introduced into the type, one is killed as a sacrifice of atonement for sin, and then the idea is transferred to the other, which carries on the action of the type. The priest lays his hands upon its head, confesses over it the sins of the people, and sends it away into the wilderness. The two animals represent different parts or phases of the one New Testament action. The first, the *cleansing* from sin by the blood of Christ; the second, the *separation* from sin by the same blood.

The sacrifice in which Abraham is here engaged, affords another instance of the same sort of doubled or transferred type. The typical object in the offering of Isaac was to represent first the death of Christ, which it

did with great precision, but its meaning was not exhausted at that stage. It was, we now find (Heb. xi. 19), further intended to represent the resurrection of Christ from the dead, and it effected its double object in the following way. First, Isaac is the victim. He is bound, laid on the altar, the knife is raised, he is, as far as intention goes, slain and offered. At that moment the action is transferred to another victim, in the death of which the offering is actually completed, and then Isaac again represents the victim alive once more after the death. This transaction is expressed in the passage of the Epistle to the Hebrews, where the father, Abraham, is introduced first contemplating his son as among the dead, and then the words go on, 'from whence also he received him back in a figure;' the figure being this typical transaction, which represents him as first dead and then risen again: the whole object being to typify, first, the death, and then the resurrection of Christ.

If the eye be cast along the outline of the

Scripture plan, it will become apparent that this, the intended sacrifice of Isaac, has, in fact, the close connection with the death of Abraham's great descendant, Jesus of Nazareth, which has been ascribed to it, and that this connection does not result from any subsequent application or arrangement, but is essentially part of the original constitution of the entire system.

The Scripture commences with a description of man as possessed of the power of choice in conduct—an assertion which reflection shows to be necessarily true—and as placed in presence of a Divine law of obedience; it relates the introduction of a series of lower motives, which we find on reflection to be also necessarily the result of his position, and to which man yields in preference to obeying the law divinely given for his life. It shows him, in consequence, miserable and fallen. It traces the operation of the same two opposing agencies in the growing race. The law of Divine will and the law of human will still in competition, and still producing, according

as they are obeyed, their respective characteristic results.

The lower law is ever described through the volume as a bondage, the higher as a freedom; obedience to the latter since the fall as attainable only by effort; subjection to the former as only avoidable by effort. The Divine love is described as striving for man's rise, the hostile power as seeking to perpetuate his slavery. The Divine promise is given from the very first that the enemy shall be defeated and destroyed, though by the suffering of the victor. It is with this promise as its theme that Scripture begins to unfold itself. But no immediate triumph is described as attending the principles it proposes to advocate. On the contrary, the lower law, as we should expect from the conditions of the case, spreads its influence with the greatest rapidity; while obedience to the higher law is by degrees contracted within the smallest limits. The consummation of the lower principles is destruction, the result of the higher is life through obedience. At the

flood this latter is separated from antagonistic influences and transplanted as a germ into a new field.

After a time we find the same conflict between the two systems again waging, and once more the same results follow. The lower principles are given off and produce the worldly system of life, containing the same poison as the antediluvian world, though in a mitigated form ; while a new plant from the higher system is to propagate the Divine principle of life with increased energy. The Church, once more reduced within the limits of the single family of Abraham, again receives close and familiar communication from heaven, as in the first days on earth ; and the original promise of restoration from bondage is seen to be fully in action towards its completion. This action and evolution of the promise forms one continuous thread through the history of Abraham ; while another thread intertwined with it is made up of the struggle between the two laws, no longer traced generally in its results on the

world, but shown in its effects on the course of the individual man.

In the mechanism of Scripture the serpent expresses the enemy, while the misery and repeated destructions of those who have accepted the law of rebellion introduced by the serpent, show forth already the bruising of the head or final overthrow of his power. On the other hand, the meaning of 'the seed of the woman' is by degrees placed in train for definition. Its function as regards blessing is assured in repeated promise to Abraham, who receives in Isaac the first fruits of hope. The attention of the votaries of the higher law is henceforth attracted into a specific channel, and in a long succession of connections, by figure, by incident, by personification, by declaration, by mysterious utterance, the chain is kept united from Isaac up to Christ, for whom is expressly claimed the position of being the fulfilment of the first great prophecy and the bruiser of the serpent's head; while any further opportunity for its fulfilment is, indeed, prevented by the

destruction of the Jewish polity, which succeeds His advent. If we inquire how far Jesus of Nazareth has produced results corresponding to the nature of the mission thus assigned to Him, we find that while He failed to satisfy the distorted Jewish view of the functions of Messiah—a view in itself the consequence of a lapse into worldliness, He was yet eminently successful in giving a blow to the lower system of life—a blow which has produced results extending so widely and increasing so constantly, that it is by no means an exaggeration to describe it as a death blow, or bruising of the head of the serpent, and therefore as a fulfilment of the promise made at the Fall. The question, however, which remains is as to what is the meaning of that part of the original prophecy which speaks of ‘the bruising of the heel,’ or the injury to be received by the victor in carrying out his plan of redemption. The death of Christ, resulting from the fulfilment of His mission, if it stood alone, would not correspond with this, as it would be a catastrophe

too great to be in proportion with the words, 'bruising the heel,' which point to a comparatively slight injury; but the death of Christ taken in connection with His immediate resurrection from the dead, will satisfy these words, and place Him in the required position for the fulfilment of the prophecy.

But now we have still to ask what probability there is that the incident of the offering of Isaac was intended to prefigure this death and rising again of Christ? That incident is described as a tempting or trying of Abraham by God, and it has been ingeniously said\* that such a trial by God implies a reward or recompense, if it result favourably; and that no such reward appears as granted to Abraham (but see ch. xxii. 15), nor any further communication made to him from this time forth. Such reward must, therefore, be sought in the incident itself, and it is found in the information divinely conveyed to the Patriarch by means of this

\* Bp. Warburton: *Divine Legation*, vi. 5.



typical circumstance as to the nature of the work of Christ, and as to the mode of the fulfilment of that promise, of which he himself held the first beginnings; and that as it was the great desire of the Patriarch that he might see Christ's day, in this event 'he saw it, and was glad.'\*

It is, at any rate, certain that Abraham is represented by the Scripture as standing definitely forth the commencement of the more special part of that system of which Christ was the completion, and that his son Isaac is in the most distinguished way marked out in connection with the plan. The greatest stress is laid upon this son as the heir of promise, as the seed from which should come blessing, as the beginning of an infinite extension and of benefit to all nations of the earth. In all this he is anticipatory of Christ. His birth, long desired and long delayed, heralded by

\* See also Hengstenberg's *Christology*, *in loc.* Stier, however, and some others, following Maldonatus, differ from the generally received view. See Stier on John viii. 56.

Divine announcements; his name of rejoicing pre-ordained; the method, beyond the course of nature, of his birth; the hostility with which his brother regards him; in all this he is also an anticipation of Christ. Not, let it be observed, that it is intended to be said that such circumstances, occurring in a different connection, would entitle us to attach this meaning to them. They acquire their peculiar force, being what they are, from the fact of the positional relationship of Isaac and Christ—one being the first link in the chain, of which the other is the last link; one being described as the son of the father of the faithful on earth, at the beginning of the temporal dispensation—the other as the Son of the Father of the faithful in heaven, at the beginning of the eternal dispensation. ‘Nor can God the Father, who gave His only begotten Son, be better expressed than by this Patriarch, in his readiness to sacrifice his son, “his only son Isaac, whom he loved.”’ \*

Under these circumstances, where the whole

\* Bishop Pearson.

Lecture the Twenty-third. 275

of the recorded life of Isaac is thus full of points which are afterwards reproduced in a higher scale in the life of Christ, it would surely be unreasonable on meeting this incident of the offering up—which, occurring at a critical period in the patriarchal series, tallies in exact proportion with the great offering up of the Gospel—to refuse to admit its relationship to that event, especially as without such relationship no other probable explanation can be given of its introduction and use in the Old Testament narrative.

It has been supposed that, as in this event Abraham obtained the desired insight into the nature of the sacrificial work of the great promised seed, so the name given by him to this eminent place of offering, ‘the Lord shall see’ or ‘provide,’ remaining as it did, in common use long afterwards, up to the time when the record became fixed, served to direct attention to the great event.

It should not pass unobserved, when Abraham had thus crowned his first act of obedience in offering his son by giving this name

of 'the Lord will see or provide,' tantamount as it would be to a confession of faith in the Divine reality which that event symbolised, that a further stage of revelation, and one evidently intended to be distinct from the preceding, is then introduced. It is the last manifestation vouchsafed to the Patriarch; it follows upon the highest achievement of his faith, it contains the sum of all past revelations made to him; and, in addition, it presents a feature which unites Abrahamic promise in a remarkable way to the original prophecy at the Fall. It is introduced with great solemnity: 'The Angel of the Lord called unto Abraham out of heaven the second time, and said, By myself have I *sworn*, saith the Lord,\* for because thou hast done this thing and hast not withheld thy

\* Heb. vi. 17: 'God, willing more abundantly to show unto the heirs of promise the immutability of His counsel, confirmed it by an oath.'

Juratione Dei firmata promissio.—Sæpe enim promiserat sed nunquam juraverat. Quid autem est Dei veri veracisque juratio, nisi promissi confirmatio, et infidelium quædam increpatio?—August. *De Civ. Dei*, xvi. 32.

son, thine *only* son, that in blessing I will bless thee, and in multiplying I will multiply thy seed as the stars of the heaven, and as the sand which is upon the seashore.' And then, after this double imagery, adopted from heaven and from earth, has been used to express the degree of extension of the Church, there is an approach to the very ground of the first prophecy, the enmity again appears on the surface, and a note of victory is sounded: 'And thy seed shall possess the gate of his enemies.' In Gen. iii. 15, where the immediate point regarded is contest between the seed of the woman and the serpent, victory is expressed as destruction of the serpent; here, where the point is 'the blessing of all nations in the Patriarch's seed,' another aspect of the same fact is regarded. The dominion of the serpent among souls is to be overthrown, captives are to be rescued, the Lord is to reign where Satan reigned, the prophecy therefore takes another form: 'Thy seed shall possess the gate of his enemies.'

At this point the sacred mission of Abraham reaches its climax. These words form the inheritance of the coming Church, and placed thus on the cradle of the great nation, which consciously recognised in Abraham its sacred originator, such words must in various ways have exercised a vast influence on the piety of coming generations. Repointed from time to time by the missions of subsequent prophecy, they would retain their force up to the very period of their realisation in the coming of Christ. Thus, we find in Luke ii. Zacharias, described as filled with the Holy Ghost, prophesying and blessing the Lord God of Israel, who had raised up a horn of salvation for His people: ‘As he spake by the mouth of his holy prophets which have been since the world began, That we should be saved from our *enemies and from the hand of all that hate us*, to perform the mercy promised to our fathers and to remember his holy covenant. The oath which he sware to our father Abraham, that he would grant

Lecture the Twenty-third. 279

unto us that we, *being delivered out of the hand of our enemies, might serve him without fear*, in holiness and righteousness before Him all the days of our life.'

## XXIV.

FROM the great revelation of Jehovah-jireh the narrative passes by one of those transitions prevalent in Scripture, and which mark its resemblance to the dealings of Providence, to a minute incident which is to prepare the way for the fulfilment of the great events announced: 'And it came to pass after these things that it was told Abraham, saying, Behold Milcah, she hath also born children unto thy brother Nahor.\*' From that it passes on again to the death of Sarah. Her son of promise having now arrived at manhood, the work assigned her is accomplished, and she disappears from the history. No effort is made to surround her departure with special interest. With a true estimate of the religious value of his characters, the sacred

\* Gen. xxii. 20.



Lecture the Twenty-fourth. 281

scribe has avoided this risk, as have the writers of the New Testament the corresponding difficulty with regard to the Virgin.

Considerable stress, however, is laid upon the acquisition of a burialplace by the Patriarch. The first recorded death has occurred in the newly covenanted church. Abraham seeks a sepulchre. He will not receive it as a gift from the people of the land, just as before he had refused the gifts of Sodom. The little parcel of earth which will be his sole possession in that country which God will give to his descendants shall be bought with the substance which God has given to him, and there he will bury his dead. The choice of the sepulchres of the people had been previously offered him, but in death as in life he will be apart.

How full of the spirit of the future does this incident seem. The Patriarch 'old and well stricken in age,' with the promise of the land, but as yet without possession in it, exhibits on this point no uneasiness. The hope of the promised seed had awakened all

his anxieties, and occasioned some of his mistakes. The prospect of the promised land fails to move him, nor does he make any effort to secure it. At the close of his career we now find him but little more endowed than his holy descendant, who found His only earthly possession in the garden tomb. Comparing the anxiety of the Patriarch in the case where his promise appeared to be failing, with his security on this point, we are led to conclude that his vision regarded some fulfilment beyond the present. That he who could thus bury his dead and shortly himself depart without regret or question, and whose only care was the possession of a grave, looked not for transitory promises, but as the Apostle to the Hebrews affirmed, 'By faith he sojourned in the land of promise, as in a strange country, dwelling in tabernacles with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise: for he looked for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God: '\*

\* Heb. xi. 8-13.

Lecture the Twenty-fourth. 283

a thought which is again expressed of him in common with the other worthies who 'died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off, and were persuaded of them, and embraced them, and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth:' 'For they that say such things declare plainly that they seek a country. And truly if they had been mindful of that country from whence they came out, they might have had opportunity to have returned. But now they desire a better country, that is an heavenly; wherefore God is not ashamed to be called their God: for he hath prepared for them a city.'

After the death of Sarah, the next point dwelt on is the marriage of her son Isaac. It is remarkable that this event should be given with such minuteness and particularity, that its relation forms one of the longest chapters in the Bible. At first sight it might almost appear as though an imperfect view of the comparative value of facts could alone have brought out this incident into a prominence so

much greater than that of the many important events which had preceded it in the narrative. But further reflection will show that, far from this being the case, it is in reality one of those circumstances which manifest most convincingly the supreme wisdom which has presided over the construction of Scripture. It was of great importance at the very first step in the foundation of the nation which was 'to dwell alone,' and whose isolation would be so difficult, and yet so necessary to maintain, that it should be set out clearly and strikingly that their great founder and model recognised and took the utmost care to enforce this principle. It was of not less importance in a record which was by degrees so intimately to affect the individual life in all nations, that the first marriage described should show the true rule of conduct in parents, bridegroom, and bride; and that God should be seen extending his protection and blessing over the formation of so holy a relationship; and further than this, again, when we consider the position which Isaac

## Lecture the Twenty-fourth. 285

occupies in Scripture, it may appear not improbable that there may remain other reasons for investing this event with so much importance.

Isaac, in every previous circumstance of his life, had been used as a prominent type of Christ, and stood out as his great representative at this period. As his birth had already foreshown Christ's birth for men, his offering Christ's offering for men, so his marriage may have some note of resemblance to Christ's union with the Church. This union, in its various phases, is perpetually described through Scripture by the symbolism of marriage and the incidents connected with it; and this method of description is made use of in a chain of passages extending from the books of Moses to the very last chapter in Revelation. If we consider the way in which such passages are constantly used, it will not appear improbable that, under the other reasons for giving the marriage of Isaac at such length, there may be in addition the further one of showing forth the union between Christ and the Church. The arrangement of

## 286    Lectures on Early Scripture.

the narrative lends itself readily to this view. The commission from the father is to 'his servant the elder of his house,'\* to go into a land with which the father was once closely connected, and to seek to bring out thence a bride for his son. The minister is bound to his office by an oath on the covenant. The promise to encourage him is that the Lord shall send his angel before him. If the woman will not be willing to follow the minister, he is acquitted of his responsibility. The minister bears with him for the bride all the most precious gifts which his master has to bestow.† When arrived at the point of his mission, he engages in the prayer of faith addressed to God as the Covenant God. The bride is made known to him in a work of charity, receives precious gifts, which indicate for her honour and submission. The minister glorifies God, declaring the work to be His.‡ The

\* Prof. Bush.

† So renders Sept. ἔλαβεν ἀπὸ πάντων τῶν ἀγαθῶν τοῦ κυρίου αὐτοῦ. 'Ex omnibus bonis ejus portans secum,' Vulg.

‡ Luke i. 68.

bride consents to depart from her own people and her father's house,\* is blessed for abundant increase, meets the bridegroom by the way of the sacred well of the vision of God, prostrates herself before him, and seeks from the minister instruction regarding him. The servant declares him as his master. The bride covers herself with her veil. The servant gives an account of his stewardship. The bride is received into the tent of honour; and the whole concludes by a declaration of the love which the bridegroom bears her, and the solace he finds in her society.

This point furnishes a most appropriate ending to the public and representative career of the great Patriarch Abraham, making it in type coextensive with the proportions of the history of the Church. From this time, his work being complete, he begins to disappear from the narrative. His other alliances are barely mentioned, and serve chiefly to bring out by contrast the position of Sarah and her son. The remainder of his life is summed up in

\* Psalm xlv. 10.

eight verses; the last of which (Gen. xxv. 8) records that he 'gave up the ghost and died in a good old age, an old man and full of years (or, "not of years only, but of all the blessings of life," Bishop Horsley; and "satisfied with this world, was ripe for a better," Scott), and was gathered to his people;' in which concluding expression there is still teaching, for by it the mind of the Church would be carried on to contemplate the 'rest which remaineth for the people of God,' and in some measure to understand beforehand that which Abraham's great descendant, 'the seed of the woman' and 'heir of promise,' afterwards proclaimed in His Gospel, and which Abraham, in death as in life, illustrated (Matt. xix. 29): '*And every one that hath forsaken houses, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands, for my name's sake, shall receive an hundred-fold, and shall inherit everlasting life.*'





